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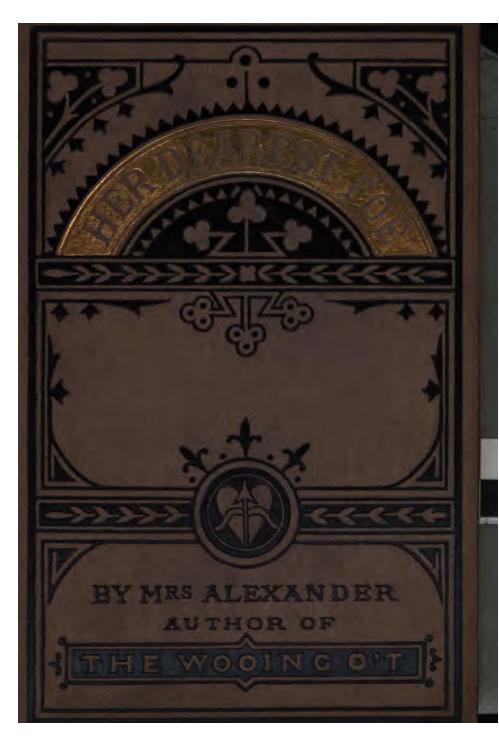
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HER DEAREST FOE.

A Aobel.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,
AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," AND "WHICH SHALL IT BE?"

IN THREE VOLUMES. VOL. I.





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HER DEAREST FOE.

CHAPTER I.

OU have been good! very good to me!"

The sounds were slowly, brokenly uttered, as though the

mechanism that produced them had well-nigh run down for ever.

The speaker lay helplessly back upon his pillow, his grey hair disordered, ashy pale, with the shadow of the great King already on his brow—a somewhat rugged, but not ignoble face—the lines about the mouth, so hard in life, relaxed—the keen, stern eyes dim and dreamy.

The bed on which he lay, the luxuriously-furnished room, the many appliances to relieve pain and assist weakness—all bespoke VOL. I.

wealth. At some distance, in a large easy-chair, sat a stout elderly woman, evidently the professional nurse; and beside the bed, holding the sufferer's hand tenderly in both her own, stood a lady, tall, slight, wrapped in a dressing-gown of soft grey, her eyes fixed intently on him, as if gathering up his words, and unconscious of the tears that had welled over and slowly coursed down her cheeks.

"I have loved you very much! I wish I had been less stern, less exacting," he went on with difficulty; "but remember always, I loved"—the voice dropped to a whisper with the last word, and he closed his eyes.

"You have always been most kind and generous," returned his hearer softly; "you have nothing to reproach yourself with!" and she bent down to kiss his brow.

"I have! I have!" Another long pause. during which he seemed to sleep. Again the poor dim eyes opened. "Kate! Are you there, Kate?"

"Yes, dear. Here always."

"You will think I have been unjust, that I have done too much for——"

A few moments after he added, "I am sorry, but it is too late——"

"For what?" asked his wife, gently. The question was never answered.

For nearly an hour he lay silent. The nurse after a while rose and advanced a chair so that the lady might rest without relinquishing the thin, bony, helpless hand that lay in hers; then the door opened to admit the doctor, who, with a whispered word or two to the nurse, and a silent bow to the mistress of the house, took his station at the foot of the bed. Once more the deepset eyes opened wide with something of their old light, and the dying man breathed out low, but distinctly, the word "Remember!" A few long-drawn sighs, and the watchers listened in vain for the breath that had ceased for ever.

The doctor bent over the bed, then uttered, slowly and gently, the words, "It is all over!"

Still the lady did not stir; still she held the cold hand for a few moments longer, then laid it softly down, and stood, her own clasped together, the picture of profound, sad abstraction.

"Call Mrs. Mills," whispered the doctor.

The nurse nodded and left the room, returning almost immediately with a tall,

angular-looking, elderly woman, whose air and attire bespoke the housekeeper or confidential maid. She, too, paused, and gazed reverentially on the prostrate form that had been her master; then, passing on to the lady, who still stood motionless, said, in a low but harsh whisper, "Come away, my lamb! come away! You have done all that woman could for him, and you may rest now. Come with me!"

At the evidently familiar sound of the voice the lady turned, and leaning her head against Mills's shoulder, wept bitterly though quietly, trembling all over.

Mills drew her arm through her own, and with a slight nod to the doctor, repeating "Come away!" led the wearied mourner out of the room.

After a few directions to the nurse, the doctor too left the chamber of death, and passed out into a large square landing, well warmed and lighted, upon which various doors opened. He descended the stairs and went into the dining-room.

A well-dressed man, probably a gentleman, was slowly pacing to and fro, and stood suddenly still, face to face with the doctor. He was slightly above middle height, with

sloping shoulders. Tolerably regular features, glittering, anxious eyes, and abundant, well-trained hair and whiskers, made up what their owner considered a decidedly good-looking whole. "Well," he said, with a sort of effort and a nervous twitching of the lip; "Well?"

"Our poor friend is at rest," replied the other; "passed away very tranquilly—nature quite exhausted." He stepped to the fireplace as he spoke, and rang the bell.

"And she is?" resumed the first speaker, in a curious broken voice, catching his words abruptly. He stopped an instant, then continued more quietly: "Mrs. Travers? Is she——" He paused again.

"Tolerably calm! sensible woman. Still I must write a little prescription for her. Nerves are not made of iron. She has really had great fatigue, and—— Oh, Edwards!" to a staid, elderly man-servant who answered the bell, "I want some writing materials; and, Edwards, I think I must ask you to give Mr. Ford and myself a glass of wine."

"Yes, sir, certainly," replied Edwards. He proceeded to set forth the desired refreshment with alacrity, and then went in search of the writing materials.

"Not for me," said Mr. Ford, rejecting the glass offered him, with upturned hand; "it would choke me."

"Nonsense!" said the doctor, a cheery, chirrupy little man; "it will keep out the cold and the fog. I am glad you are here, Mr. Ford. You will perhaps be so good as to see Mr. Wall this evening, give him my compliments, and say I will see to the registry, as I was present at our poor friend's death. You and he, of course, know who to write to; but it seems to me that the widow is terribly alone. Some female relative, now, ought to be with her; but I am perhaps going out of my proper sphere to offer any suggestion. Ah, thank you, thank you, that will do nicely "-this to the servant-and the little man began to scrawl hastily over the paper placed before him.

"You are right, sir," said Mr. Ford, drawing a chair to the table, and smoothing back his hair slowly and reflectively. "She, I mean Mrs. Travers, stands singularly, sadly alone. I may say that, although but a humble individual, I am her oldest, almost her only friend."

"Dear me! Indeed, indeed," returned the doctor, absently, as he read over his prescription and again rang the bell. "Here, Edwards, will you send this round to the surgery at once—at once, Edwards?"

"Yes, sir," and the man retired.

"You were saying?" observed the doctor interrogatively, as he placed himself on the hearth-rug.

"We were speaking of Mrs. Travers," resumed Ford. "She has been kept singularly apart from her former friends; and there is no one now, save myself, who knew her in her early days. I knew her dear mother also, and all the circumstances—that is——Perhaps, under the circumstances, she might like to see me before I return to town?"

"What! this evening! now?" asked the doctor in evident surprise. "Well, you know best. You might inquire."

But the doctor's tone seemed to steady Mr. Ford's nerves and recall him to himself.

"No, no," he returned; "not now, of course; in a few days, no doubt, she will send for me; in the meantime, my best efforts will be directed to arrange everything so as to cause as little trouble to the executors as possible."

"I fancy there is a large real and personal estate, eh?"

"Tolerable—tolerable, sir," returned Mr. Ford rubbing his hands over each other, with an air of superior information.

"Well, you will lose no time in communicating with Mr. Wall," said the doctor; "and," glancing at the clock, "you will just catch the 7.30 train if you start at once. Have a glass of wine before you go? Do."

"Not a drop!" returned Mr. Ford with stern resolution.

A few more words and he sallied forth, holding down his umbrella against the driving rain of a December evening, to make his way to the station, which was fortunately close at hand.

Three days after, the following formed one of the entries in that column which is supposed to possess so deep an interest for the female readers of the *Times*:—

"On the 12th instant, at Hampton Court, aged sixty-three, Richard Travers, Esq., of St. Hilda's Place, E.C., and Hereford Square, Tyburnia."

This announcement caused some gossip at Lloyd's, the Jerusalem, and even among Dick, Tom, and Harry at the luncheon-bars in the neighbourhood of St. Hilda's Place.

"So Travers is dead," was observed among

the underwriters. "What will become of the business?"

- "Is there no one to take it up?"
- "Capital East Indian connection."
- "Not a bad trade with the Cape."
- "Left no son?"
- "No; married late—a foolish marriage. Some country girl, they say."
 - "Who is heir?"
 - "Has none, I believe."
- "Ford, his manager, is a shrewd, steady fellow; he might keep the business together," &c., &c.

While over the luncheon-bar the dashing young clerks at Travers's were condoled with on the possible "shutting up" of the "concern," and questioned as to how much "the Governor" was probably worth. "Travers & Co.," though a somewhat old-fashioned house, not working any of your globe-girdling speculative, gigantic operations, was much respected, and looked upon as being safe as the Bank, and considerably safer than a joint-stock bank.

All persons belonging to "Travers & Co." had a well-to-do, not to say gentleman-like air, and, generally speaking, were prosperous.

And now the inevitable vulgarities of every-

day life must tread close after, in the very footprints of the mighty, irresistible King.

Whispers of inexorable business penetrate the quiet chamber where the lonely young widow sits and broods over the strange, sad, and yet not utterly unwelcome liberty that has come to her. She must not appear until clothed in the sable garments suited to her state. She has neither father, mother, brother, relative of any degree at hand to act for her; and so, when a card, bearing the inscription "Mr. W. Wall," is brought to her, late the second day after her husband's death, she observes to her maid, "I must see him, Mills, of course," and, rising wearily, moves to the door.

"Mr. Ford is below, and wants to know if you will see him?"

"Indeed I cannot. I am very much obliged to him for all his kind thought and interest, but Mr. Wall will do all I want at present. Tell Mr. Ford I will see him in a few days; show Mr. Wall up to the drawing-room."

The lawyer, a tall, thin, close-lipped man, grey and angular with advancing years, was but slightly acquainted with his friend and client's wife.

He had long known and respected the deceased, whose marriage had sorely disappointed and chafed him. It was with a sort of resentful reluctance he presented himself to the designing syren who had entrapped and bamboozled poor Travers, and induced him to leave the whole of his handsome fortune away from his own relations and natural heir.

Yet even he was insensibly mollified by the half-stately, half-subdued air of the objectionable widow.

"Thank you for coming to me so soon, Mr. Wall," she said, holding out her hand frankly to him. "I wanted to see you so much, and yet I seemed too dull to know how to send."

"While I rather hesitated lest I should be intruding too soon," replied the lawyer. "But there is much to be done and thought of; and not knowing any friend or relative more intimate with you than myself——"He paused abruptly, feeling he was on delicate ground.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Travers. The low, clear voice, though very soft, had in it a certain finish, a musical completeness of intonation, which generally secured attention, and

Mr. Wall listened intently as she tranquilly piloted him out of his difficulty.

"I am singularly alone; so, even if you do not like me very much"—a sweet smile, sad, not unamused, but perfectly frank, and free from the smallest tinge of deprecation—"act as if you did for the present."

"My dear madam."

"There, there! I am quite sure you will be a considerate and conscientious adviser, and help me to fulfil, even to the smallest minutiæ, the wishes of—of him whom we have lost." She hesitated, and her voice trembled as she alluded to her husband, and then she remained silent till she could recover herself.

"I shall be most happy to assist you to the utmost of my power," said Mr. Wall more cordially than he had yet spoken. "I have a will executed by your late husband about four years ago; are you aware that he has made any other? I find from Mr. Ford there is some idea abroad that he has; if so, it is most strange that we knew nothing of it. He always consulted us in all matters—especially myself."

"I think he has; I think he has," returned Mrs. Travers thoughtfully. She had seated herself on a sofa, and, resting her elbow on the pillow, leaned her cheek upon her hand.

"You think he has!" repeated the lawyer much surprised.

"I can only so understand his last words to me," continued his client. "He said he hoped I would not think he had done too much for— Then he stopped, and never Now I immediately uttered the name. fancied he meant his cousin Hugh, for I know when he made the will to which you allude, he was terribly irritated against him, and therefore far from being just. I have often made Mr. Travers angry by urging this upon him, and entreating him to make a fairer distribution of his property. But I always imagined he resented my interference too much to follow my suggestions, though he loved me well. Where shall I find such a friend as he was!"

She covered her face to hide the tears that would come.

"Certainly his words point to another will," resumed Mr. Wall after a moment's respectful silence. "Yet I cannot but consider it most improbable. However, it is our duty to make every search."

"What reason did Mr. Ford give for sup-

posing there was another will?" asked Mrs. Travers.

"I really did not ask him. He mentioned it only just now as we were waiting together in the dining-room. He seems an excellent man, full of zeal for his late employer, and rightly so: a better master, a more honourable gentleman never existed."

The solemn panegyric, though stiffly, was not unkindly said. Mrs. Travers held out her hand silently and gratefully to him; he bowed over it, and went on:

"Ford is a keen man of business, and thoroughly understands the management of the house. When you feel equal to see him, you will find him useful in many ways."

"I have no doubt I shall," replied Mrs. Travers carelessly. "But, in the meantime, will you, my dear sir, see and ascertain from him what has been said or reported about the will. We may get some clue to guide our search, and there is no use in looking at the will you have until we feel sure there is no other."

After receiving Mrs. Travers's directions respecting the funeral and some minor matters, the lawyer returned to the dining-room, considerably mollified towards his late client's

widow, though it would have puzzled him to give a reason for the subtle change. Probably the simple, straightforward sincerity of her tone, the evident effort to suppress rather than display a grief unmistakably real, these symptoms — so widely different from the "drowned in woe" aspect he expected from the designing minx who had entrapped his friend—blunted his suspicions in spite of himself, though he was half ashamed to feel them slipping from him.

The dining-room was unoccupied when the lawyer entered, and, looking round, he passed into a smaller room which opened upon the garden, and had been used by the late master of the house as a morning-room or study. Here Mr. Wall found the man he sought, who, standing with his back to the door, was so occupied in examining a water-colour sketch of Mrs. Travers, which, though unfinished, was remarkably like, that he did not hear the lawyer's approach, and started when he addressed him.

- "I was afraid you had gone, Mr. Ford. I want particularly to speak to you."
- "I am quite at your service—and," with a slight, almost imperceptible catch or hesitation, "I thought it possible Mrs. Travers

might wish to see me. I have had the honour of being on such confidential terms with our late excellent friend, and having been fortunate in doing Mrs. Travers herself some little service——"

Mr. Ford bowed in silence; so that Mr. Wall did not notice his expression. He also passed his handkerchief across his brow, as if warm or oppressed, and then rubbed his hands over each other with a nervous pressure; meantime, Mr. Wall proceeded:

"We are very desirous of ascertaining if Mr. Travers has made any disposition subsequent to the will executed in '54. May I ask what are the rumours you have heard on the subject?"

"Only this, that yesterday, one of our clerks, Poole, who used to come to and fro with papers and cheques to our late worthy principal after his first attack last spring—Poole said, 'He did not make that will much too soon.' I naturally asked what will he alluded to, and he told me that some months

ago, Mr. Travers sent for him, and when he went into the private room, he found Gregory with Mr. Travers. Gregory was our cashier; you may remember he took a holiday last summer, the first for twenty years—went to the seaside and caught fever, which carried him off. We had a move in consequence, and you recommended young Pierson for—"

"I remember it well! Pray go on."

"Well, Poole and Gregory witnessed Mr. Travers's signature to what Poole understood to be his will—of the purport he was, of course, ignorant."

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Wall, and stood a moment or two in deep thought. "This is very decisive indeed. Yet it seems almost incredible to me that he should have kept such a matter from Mrs. Travers and myself! However, all that now remains is for us to make a careful examination of all papers, &c. Is it not strange this man Poole never gave any previous hints?"

"I think not," returned Ford. "The young men in Mr. Travers's employ were considerably afraid of him, and as Poole seemed to think there was no secret in the occurrence, he was less likely to talk about it."

"True," said Mr. Wall, and paused as if

considering the subject; then repeated the word "True. I will see Mrs. Travers again. It is only four o'clock. Nothing can be done until we know who is to administer the estate: the sooner we commence our search the better. I will just step up to Mrs. Travers, and return to you immediately." So saying, the methodical lawyer left Mr. Ford to his reflections, which seemed to be of a chequered hue. First, he returned to his contemplation of Mrs. Travers's picture; once or twice he pressed his hands together with a sort of nervous tension, holding his head now to this side and now to that, so as to catch the different lights thrown by the lamp which Edwards had brought.

"Yes, yes," he whispered to himself with a smile—a not unkindly smile, yet with an undefinable tinge of malignity in it, a sort of anticipative triumph. "It is his turn to-day—mine will come."

"Mrs. Travers is quite willing we should commence our examination at once; but doubts that such a document is among the papers here. Are you aware that Mr. Travers kept any at his office? Indeed, I suppose he was scarcely there since the period this man Poole mentions."

"Oh yes, he was. He attended to business with much regularity all last spring and part of the summer."

"Well, Mr. Ford, let us begin. Here are the keys of this escritoire."

For more than two hours did the two men of business seek carefully and systematically amid the papers and documents contained in a tin box or two, in an old brass-bound writing-desk, in all imaginable places—but in vain; and, after partaking of refreshment, they departed baffled and silent.

While Mrs. Travers sits wrapped in thought over the fire in her dressing-room, unable either to form any defined plan, or even speculate on her own future, and a subdued note of solemn preparation vibrates through the household, let us put some of the memories which crowd the young widow's mind into a tangible form, and supply a key to the position.



CHAPTER II.

BOUT sixteen or seventeen years before the date of this chapter, a certain kindly, scholarly, elderly clergyman named Lee was per-

petual curate of the petty parish we shall call Cullingford.

Though not remote, it was retired and unknown save to experienced anglers, for the trout-fishing in its neighbourhood was excellent.

The Rev. William Lee was a small celebrity in his way. He had for many years eked out a very insufficient income by preparing young gentlemen for the army, navy, and the universities.

It was before competitive examinations had been invented; still some preparation was necessary.

Mr. Lee's young gentlemen did not do badly, so his school prospered; and the village, with the fields and woodlands round about, were the more cheerful for the sunny, healthy young life constantly overflowing the boundaries of the parsonage.

Mr. Lee had been early left a widower with one son—his idol—and a costly idol.

This special worship, and a general tentency not to turn away from those that would borrow of him, prevented the good curate's earnings from remaining in that concrete condition favourable to ease of circumstances. Still he had enough, and thought his lot a fair one, until his son, "his only son," was cut off by a few hours of cholera in India, leaving a little delicate orphan baby girl, first to plague and then to delight her desolate grandfather.

The nearest dwelling to the parsonage was a very humble cottage, originally not much beyond a gamekeeper's or gardener's lodge in size and style, but bearing the outward and visible signs of its inmates in the refined prettiness of its bit of pleasure-ground, in

the dainty drapery of its muslin curtains. and in the carefully trained roses and honeysuckle which made its porch in summer time all blossom and perfume. Holmewood Cottage had, about this time, been tenanted for nearly two years by a lady with one little girl—the widow, so it was understood in the village, of young Reginald Lee's dearest friend, who had stood by his death-bed, and sent the sad tidings to the bereaved father. At any rate, the curate was for long the widow's only friend, nearly her only acquaintance. She was a fair, soft, sad-looking woman, with weak health and shattered nerves; her one tie to life a bright-eyed, brown-haired, active, restless, joyous little girl of five or six, with a sweet smile and a laugh full of glee, who soon wound herself round both the curate and his stern housekeeper, and was the spoiled pet of even the most cynical girl-hater among the curate's young gentlemen.

It is a strong temptation to pause and hold up some pictures of those happy days of young life among the bowery lanes and shady woodlands, by the merry cricket ground, the fresh uplands, and especially by the glorious trout-streams for which the neighbourhood was famous; to describe the peace, the dreaminess, the silent thought-progress, the gradual unfolding of ambition to know, to see, to leave the happy valley and try the eddies and currents of the great, dreadful, beautiful, beckoning world beyond. But it must be resisted.

None save Mr. Lee knew how scanty were the widow's resources, and with benevolent alacrity he did his very best to assist the education of her daughter. But the time came when she must be sent to school. This separation seemed to rend the mother's life. Then came a series of partings—for the widow was sure to be seriously ill when Katie had been away a few months—and the child was sent for in haste. Her presence then wrought a cure, and the process was repeated.

Now this was a trial to Katie; she was ambitious, and passionately fond of study, but the tender, protecting love inspired by her gentle, timid mother enabled her to bear this and many other small worries arising from the same cause with the quiet submission of strength. Mrs. Aylmer had been, and still was, a delicately pretty woman, refined to weakness, more by nature than by training, for she was the daughter of a respectable tradesman,

who had left her and her brothers fairly well Her grace and beauty, unfortunately for herself, attracted the admiration and affection of a handsome, pleasant, well-born, but reckless young officer, who seemed to her the embodiment of all her fancy had ever painted. Difficulties and opposition only served to add fire and resolution to the lover's originally slight admiration, and at length he persuaded her to run away with him. The marriage being equally objectionable to the relatives on both sides, the erring couple were solemnly and effectually renounced; the young husband exchanged into a regiment under orders for India, and he and his plebeian bride vanished from the respectable and aristocratic circles to which they respectively belonged.

After a few years of chequered happiness, the lieutenant, having squandered more than all he possessed, fell a victim to climate and too much "brandy pawnee," leaving his widow alone in the world, with her baby, and a lieutenant's widow's pension to exist upon. To her, of course, he was a hero, towards whom fate and fortune were adverse; but Katie, whose mind was inquisitive and exceedingly common-sensible, in spite of its streaks of poetry and an ardent love of the beautiful, used sometimes,

even when she listened to her mother's loving reminiscences, stroking her hand the while tenderly, to reflect that, were she a man, with the smallest opening wherein to insert the point of the wedge, it would go hard but she would force some favour from fortune.

It was during Kate's absence at a school in Germany, to which her mother had with infinite grief permitted her to go for a few months, that Mrs. Aylmer received an advantageous proposition from a cousin, the only member of her family who recognized her existence. Mr. Hicks, the aforesaid cousin, was the proprietor of a far-famed establishment for the sale of "fishing tackle" in all varieties, including flies for all seasons and quarters. He was largely patronised by the disciples of the rod who are to be found in the precincts of the city where his shop was situated, and was a prosperous kindly soul, innocent of malice, and regardless of the letter "h."

This fishing-tackle cousin wrote to ask Mrs. Aylmer if she would be disposed to accommodate a "most desirable party" for a few weeks occasionally; the said "party" being an elderly "gentleman" who had been recommended to try change and amusement for his health. The only change he could invent was

fishing. He had been used to go down to the North, but not feeling equal to the distance, had called at Mr. Hicks's place, and asked him to recommend some quarters within an easy distance of town. Whereupon Cousin Hicks bethought him of the trout-fishing reputation of Cullingford, and of throwing a chance in the widow's way. Mrs. Aylmer took counsel with the curate, and accepted the proposal.

The little woman was ravenous to make and save money, for that meant helping Kate, and keeping Kate at home. The respectable party paid well, and stayed longer than he at first intended.

The widow made him very comfortable, and was the more successful because the respectable party was undoubtedly a gentleman.

He was, in short, Mr. Travers, head of the well-known house of Travers and Co., St. Hilda's Place, E.C.

Cullingford agreed with him. He came frequently, sometimes not in the fishing ceason. He, after the first year, rented his two rooms permanently, and his managing clerk was quite well-known on the line between G—— and Cullingford, as he went to and fro with his black bag at such times; for,

with all its rural, quiet, remote style of beauty, Cullingford was but two hours from London.

This was the addition which Kate found on her return from Germany. She was inclined to resent such an intrusion. Home was not home, with a stranger installed in the best rooms, and demanding her mother's first attention. But she soon became reconciled.

Mr. Travers was the most unobtrusive of men, though not without a certain dignity in his carriage and manners; and when Kate had occasion to see and speak with him, her mother being disabled by a nervous headache, she was considerably struck by the sort of grave chivalrous respect with which he treated her.

Gradually it grew to be a custom with him to pause a while on his way out and in, and hold some conversation with his landlady's daughter as she tied up the flowers or took off dead leaves. He did not say much, but that little proved him a gentleman of some cultivation, and then—he listened remarkably well.

Sometimes he brought Kate some new and charming books from town—not novels; these he disapproved as much as Kate loved.

He never appeared to care for Mr. Lee's acquaintance, and indeed the curate was too

much occupied in his pastoral and tutorial avocations to spare the time for its prosecution.

So two years slipped away peacefully. At the end of that time Kate paid a visit to the German school where she had spent eight or nine months, and where she had formed a close friendship with the daughters of the principal. She hoped to have made an arrangement by which her young friend Fanny Lee, now emerging from childhood, should enjoy the advantages of a complete plunge into a foreign language; but all her plans and projects were nipped in the bud.

Scarcely a month after Kate's arrival at Schlangenstein, a bad type of low fever broke out in Cullingford, where sanitary science was at that time unknown, and one of the first sufferers was Mrs. Aylmer. Kate was at once recalled, and came right willingly, though not very seriously alarmed—"the dearest mother" generally got ill when she was away, and recovered when she returned, and so it would be now.

It was not so, however; the fever was conquered, but the tender, timid, childlike mother died of the prostration which ensued. And then Kate knew how she loved her, and what desolation meant.

The day after the funeral, as Kate sat in all the unspeakable dreariness of the time when one's occupation's o'er, and the possibility of a new one has not suggested itself when the reaction after protracted hope and fear and strained watching has set in, and makes life colourless, aimless, tasteless—she was startled by the announcement that Mr. Travers was at the door, and would like much to see her. She had nearly forgotten his existence; nevertheless, she felt comforted by the idea that he thought of her, so he came in — came in more hastily, with less rigid composure than she had ever seen be-He evidently felt for her. She put her cold hand into his silently.

"My dear young lady," said Mr. Travers—and his voice, which had always pleased her, sounded unusually soft—"I have but this moment heard of your bereavement. I came down as usual, little thinking of the change which has occurred. I shall not, of course, intrude upon you; but if you can see me to-morrow, I should like to know your plans, if possible to assist you."

Very little passed then. Travers carried

away with him a keen impression of the bravery with which Kate struggled for composure, and suppressed rather than exaggerated her grief. He talked with kindly, sensible interest to her the next day; and the third, in a friendly and frank manner, suggested a solution of all doubts and difficulties by a marriage with himself.

Kate was astounded; but she was heart-whole and no sentimentalist. Mr. Travers was well-preserved, well-bred, and did not look quite thirty years older than herself. The world was strange and desolate to her; gratitude warmed her feelings towards him, and she consented.

The marriage was solemnized with unbecoming speed, so the people of Cullingford said; but, as Mr. Travers urged, Kate had no home to leave, and the sooner she was in one of her own the better. To this her only friend Mr. Lee agreed. Something he distantly hinted, respecting settlements, was met with a haughty, "Rest assured, sir, I shall not leave my wife unprovided for," which silenced the good man. Two days after, Kate Aylmer was transformed into Mrs. Travers, and carried away from the sweet, humble, happy home of her girlhood

for ever. Mr. Travers evidently wished to cut off all connection with her former life, and correspondence with Fanny Lee, though not forbidden, was discouraged.

Nearly three years after the marriage, old Mr. Lee died, and poor Fanny was left unprovided for.

Kate's lot had its angles; but, rough or smooth, it did not last in this stage. At the close of her third year of marriage, Mr. Travers caught a severe cold, an attack of bronchitis ensued, from which he partially recovered. He was ordered out of town, and not wishing to be far from his business, in the pursuit of which he had been keener than ever of late, he took a house at Hampton. Feeling better at first, he relaxed some invalid precautions, caught a second and severer cold, to which he succumbed; and Kate was again alone, though scarce so desolate as when her mother died.

The will, which had been deposited in Mr. Wall's hands soon after the receipt of an ill-judged letter from the man who had hoped to be his heir, written in reply to Mr. Travers's announcement of his marriage, was short, simple, and to most widows would have been satisfactory.

After a legacy of five hundred pounds to his chief clerk, and a few smaller bequests to an old pensioner or two and a superannuated servant, the testator's beloved wife was constituted residuary legatee and executrix in conjunction with an old City friend; no directions or wishes as to the winding-up or continuance of his business was expressed—everything was unreservedly left to the young, childless widow.

It was this will that Mrs. Travers strongly believed had been superseded by a later testament or codicil.



CHAPTER III.

UT the search for the will was fruitless; every probable and improbable corner was ransacked in vain, to the grief of Mrs. Travers, and the ill-

concealed annoyance of her solicitor.

Mr. Wall was convinced that his late client must have destroyed his second will, as, on inquiry, there appeared no doubt that he had made one; while Mrs. Travers was equally convinced he had not, and worked herself almost into a fever by fretting and conjecturing on the subject.

The last melancholy ceremonies had been performed. The windows were once more opened to the light, and the scarce intervol. I.

rupted current of every-day life flowed on as before, its crowd of common things rapidly closing up the gap, so that even the truest, deepest mourners wonder at the marvellous and often merciful operation of inevitable routine—the force that lies in the "strong necessity of living."

Kate Travers never attempted to persuade herself or others that she was broken-hearted, yet she thought much and sadly of her dead husband. He had loved her truly; but even to himself his love had been more a source of pain than pleasure. He had believed that a calm and fatherly tenderness would have tempered the warmth of conjugal affection, and have fitted him peculiarly to be the guide and guardian of the bright girl who accepted his proposal with such frank grati-He did not reckon on the spell which her individuality, and an undefined consciousness of the latent wealth of love he had not the power to draw forth, cast over him to torment and to fascinate. Before he was six months a husband he loved her with an exacting passion which was at once the misery and delight of his existence. He hated himself for the difference of their age; he would have sacrificed his all without hesitation for her

sake; yet he resented the slightest liberty of action, lest it might be the result of indifference; and was so ravenous for proofs of her affection that, when they came, the sweet incense was all evaporated in the self-torturing tests on which his eagerness to prove its purity insisted. While she, discerning things more from sympathy than deliberate observation, was slow to understand him.

At first, while mourning the loss of a cherished mother, whose helplessness had only endeared her the more, she clung gratefully and tenderly to him, and he was satisfied; but her sunny nature reasserted itself, and her girlish pleasure in rich and becoming dress, the new enjoyment of driving in her own carriage—as she soon ceased to call it and her openly expressed delight in wearing the handsome ornaments Mr. Travers bestowed upon her, opened up a hundred sources of offence. Her vivid enjoyment of books and music and painting converted these innocent objects of interest into hated rivals, and Kate never could get rid of the impression that she was in a golden cage; that, however the imprisoning wires might be jewelled and adorned, they were still there. Her good temper, grateful, easy nature, and ready tact, always prevented any open collision, save on the occasion when Mr. Travers opened a letter addressed to his wife, in which her old friend, Fanny Lee, warmly thanked her for a very opportune present of money when she had been left in sore poverty by her grandfather's death, nearly a year before our story opens; this acknowledgment, and an evident allusion to some expressions of regret from Mrs. Travers that she had lost sight of so valued a friend as old Mr. Lee, were construed by the jealous husband into evidence of his wife's preference of her past life, and a tendency to underhand dealing. In vain she explained that, having abundance of pocket-money, she thought she might dispose of some of it without troubling him on the subject. He was for some time unappeasable. A severe attack of illness occurring soon after, Mrs. Travers was glad to let the subject drop, and she gradually but very slowly regained her ascendency. At first, with fearlessness of a heart secure in its own honesty and singleness of purpose, Mrs. Travers tried to wean her husband from his morbid greed for her society—for her every look, and word, and thought, and to brighten this engrossing jealousy into pleasant, friendly, sympathetic intercourse. But, finding herself misunderstood in every attempt at a better and healthier tone, she lost heart, and gradually subsided into an adored captive. She was young, and but partially developed; as yet she knew neither her own strength nor weakness. But four years of marriage, and constant companionship with a man of cultivated though somewhat narrow mind, had greatly matured her intellect, and the last year, being much thrown on herself both in matters of action and judgment, she began to feel that she might stand alone.

Now, even under her sincere sorrow, in which the principal ingredient was regret that the departed, with all the materials of happiness about him, had gone down to the grave under the same dull shadow in which he had lived; even under her tender grief was a sweet consciousness that, however gloomily shrouded, liberty had come to her at last. Still it was very strange, that sensation of being quite mistress of the roomy, comfortable house in which she was domiciled; of having the full command of the stately and well-bred man out of livery who presided over the plate and glass; of being

really at home in her house, albeit but a ready-furnished one taken by the year, in order that Mr. Travers might enjoy pure air within an easy distance of his office. It was too strange to be pleasant yet. And then how she shrank from the look of her own face in her widow's cap! From no want of respect to the departed, she longed to throw it off; it was so unnatural, so oppressive!

She sat thinking dreamily of these things about a week after the funeral, on one of the first days of the new year. How rapidly and vividly the panorama of the past floated through her mind, and how changed was everything!

"I wish I had a nice, kind, gentlemanlike uncle or cousin!—a man is so useful. How lonely I am! I have lost my old friends, and made no new ones. Well, I shall never return to that dreary house in Hereford Square. I was wretched there! I will let it, or sell it, if I have power! How that 'if' meets me everywhere! I wish the real will could be found. I can never feel settled until it is. I am so sure it was made after our last conversation about Hugh Galbraith, when Mr. Travers seemed so offended at my persisting that his first will was unjust! It was

so like him to act upon my suggestion afterwards, and yet to conceal the act! Ah! with so much knowledge and real nobility of nature in many ways, how was it that he missed the true wisdom of frankness and trustfulness? I must find Fanny Lee; I might help her, and if she turns out anything like what I remember, she could live with me." Thinking thus dreamily, Mrs. Travers lay back in a luxurious easy-chair imported from their town house, near a glowing, blazing fire. drawing-room where she had once more established herself was a large and pleasant apartment, well filled with a mixture of oldfashioned and modern furniture. The mirrors, the chintz curtains, the larger tables, and the cabinets, were almost antique in style and pattern. Although mid-winter, the jardinières were not neglected; heaths, ferns, and chrysanthemums lent colour enough to be agree-A grand piano filled up the farther end of the room; and a pretty, fanciful, but useful writing-table stood near enough to the fire for warmth and to the window for light. look of comfort and good taste pervaded the whole.

After a few moments more of reverie, a brighter and more decided expression stole

over Mrs. Travers's features. She rang, and, rising, walked slowly towards one of the windows; a pretty garden sloped to the river, now denuded of summer adornments, and while she gazed upon without seeing it, the grave "man out of livery" opened the door.

"You rang, if you please, ma'am."

"Oh, yes. I want the Directory, Edwards."

When it was brought, Mrs. Travers sat down to her writing-table, and looked earnestly through its pages, apparently in vain. But she was interrupted. Again the door opened. Edwards appeared, salver in hand, and presented a card to his mistress.

"Mr. Ford? Show him up."

She left the writing-table, and stood ready to receive him.

Mr. Ford was a man made up of negatives; he was neither young nor old, plain nor handsome, tall nor short, gentlemanlike nor caddish. He had fine large dark eyes, rather restless in expression, very thick black whiskers faintly powdered with grey, a large, loose-looking mouth, and a smile not unkindly nor yet quite free from a tinge of malignity. He was accurately dressed in slight mourning.

"How do you do, Mr. Ford?" said Mrs. Travers, holding out her hand with a smile—a very kind but pensive smile. "I am glad to see you."

Mr. Ford took the hand, and bowed over it in silence.

"I was so sorry Edwards did not let me know when you called last Tuesday," she continued, to give him time, seeing that from some cause he was agitated. "I should certainly have seen you."

"You are very kind," said Mr. Ford, at length, clearing his throat nervously, and looking up without absolutely meeting Mrs. Travers's eyes. "I ventured to hope that for various reasons you would have received me."

"Come near the fire," was Mrs. Travers's reply; "though so bright, it is very cold."

She resumed her seat, and Ford placed himself near her.

"I almost feared to see you, dreading to find sad traces of your long watch," he continued; "but I rejoice to find you looking better than I expected."

"I feel very strange, and sad, and puzzled, but not ill. Oh! Mr. Ford, I have been quite longing to talk to you. You were so much in poor Mr. Travers's confidence; you knew us all so well before I was married, that you can tell me more than any one else."

Mr. Ford coloured slightly, and drew his chair a possible inch nearer to the widow.

"My dear Mrs. Travers, need I say how heartily I am at your service. I—a—" he hesitated, and stopped abruptly.

"Oh, I feel quite sure of your loyalty to me," she returned with a frank, unhesitating, but slightly indifferent acceptance of his assurances not exactly flattering. "Now, tell me, what do you think about this will? I think it is simply mislaid. I feel sure Mr. Travers made one in accordance with my wishes, but I never can believe he destroyed it."

"It is impossible to say. The most excellent of men are liable to strange whims, sometimes much more unpleasant whims than leaving all their property to a charming lady like your good self."

A faint tendency to frown appeared in Mrs. Travers's distinct though delicate eyebrows; but she only said, "Then you think he did destroy the will Poole witnessed?"

"I cannot come to any decision in my own mind on the subject. I only know that every

possible depository for such a document has been most carefully examined, and not a trace of it is to be found. Even if it exists I do not now think it will be discovered, and indeed I incline to believe it cannot exist."

"It is most unfortunate," said Mrs. Travers. leaning her elbow on the arm of her chair, and resting her cheek on her hand, while her deep blue eyes grew larger and darker with earnest thought as she gazed at the fire-not more earnestly than Ford gazed at her, now her eyes were turned away. "Most unfortunate," she went on slowly, as if speaking to "I do not know what to do or how herself. I feel certain Mr. Travers wished to to act. provide properly for Sir Hugh Galbraith, and now, when I suggest a division of the property with him, Mr. Wall says, 'My dear madam, you must just wait.' When I suggest that your five hundred pounds should be paid to you, 'I must just wait;' and when I say I should like to go away somewhere to shake off the sort of oppression that hangs upon me, I am met with the same impressive, 'I would not advise you to stir under the circumstances; you must just wait." She pushed back her chair slightly, as if warmed by her own impatience.

"And very sound advice too," said Ford, with a smile at once admiring and superior. "There is really nothing for it but patience. If the will does not turn up within a week or two we may conclude it has been destroyed, and act upon the original one. Fortunately, there is nothing pressing; things can go on for a while as they are. Even should the missing document be found, we may well believe that the bulk of the property and all authority will be with you—at least I suppose you have no reason to doubt this?"

The last words were uttered with a kind of insinuating curiosity, while the speaker, resting his arms on his knees, bent forward to look very keenly at his companion.

"No, I suppose not," she returned, carelessly; and then added, with much feeling, "I know he would have been guided in all things by a partiality beyond what I deserved, by a kindly consideration that never deviated——"

"What!" interrupted Mr. Ford, rising abruptly, and walking to the window; then, turning again, he repeated, "never deviated! Do I not well remember one evening in Hereford Square, not long before you came to this very house, the pain, the grief, the indignation

with which I overheard words addressed to you as I waited in the front drawing-room, words which should never have been addressed to a creature so gentle, so devoted, so——"

"Hush! hush! Mr. Ford," cried Mrs. Travers, imperiously. "I always feared you had overheard those unhappy remarks, and, not knowing what led up to them, would exaggerate their meaning. It was an affair in which I now believe I was wrong. So good a husband had a right to my fullest confidence in everything."

"Even in so slight a matter as a small gift to a young girl friend, whose feelings you would have spared the——"

"You know more than I thought," interrupted Mrs. Travers, in her turn, and looking full at him, and more sternly than her soft eyes seemed capable of looking a moment before. "But whatever opinion you may have formed, I beg you will forget the whole thing; at any rate, never name it to me."

Mr. Ford coloured and bit his lip. "I see I have offended. You must excuse me if I sometimes lose my self-command. When I remember old times, your dear respected mother, who always extended so kind a welcome to me; the sweet cottage, which seemed to me at one time an earthly paradise——" He again stopped and turned away, passing his handkerchief over his face. Mrs. Travers looked at him with a slightly wondering expression, and a vague, uncomfortable desire that he would take his departure arose in her mind.

"They were very happy, those old days," said she, soothingly, after a moment's pause; "but I hope there are many bright and prosperous ones before you yet, Mr. Ford. I am sure, if I can in any way assist your fortunes, I should not only please myself, but best fulfil my husband's good intentions; he had, I am sure, a sincere regard for you."

Mr. Ford made a gesture as if repudiating all worldly advantages which might accrue from the Travers connection.

"By the way," continued the young widow, "talking of poor dear Cullingford and old times reminds me I was looking for Mr. Reed's address when you came in. Perhaps you remember Tom Reed; though I believe he had left Mr. Lee before you knew us. He was a second or third cousin of the dear old man, and I thought he might know where Fanny is. I have quite lost sight of her since——" Mrs. Travers stopped, coloured, and added quickly:

"I once met Mr. Reed at dinner—oh, quite two years ago—and he told me then where he was to be found, but I forget; some Inn (he was studying for the Bar, or had just been called to the Bar). Perhaps you could find out, or shall I ask Mr. Wall?"

"If you will permit me, I shall make it a point to ascertain."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ford."

An awkward pause.

"I do not think," resumed the confidential clerk, "I need trespass any longer upon you. The power of attorney which I have will enable me to meet all present contingencies in the way of correspondence. Beyond this, Messrs. Wall and Wreford must advise. I see you have rather a pretty water-colour sketch of the old parsonage, with the river. Very neatly executed! But does it not strike you, now," putting up his glass, "that the clouds are a trifle woolly? And the perspective between those elms rather runs up-hill."

"No, indeed, it does not," said Mrs. Travers with a sigh. "I only see a close resemblance to a scene I love. I had no idea you were such a critic, Mr. Ford."

"I do not claim so high a title" (with the proudest humility); "but I used to do a

good deal in that line once, and I flatter myself I have a tolerably correct eye."

"Indeed! I did not think you were an artist in addition to your high business qualifications."

"Pray do not look on me as a mere machine," replied Ford with his peculiar smile. "But I must not keep you standing. I wish you good-day."

"Good-morning; and, pray do not forget Mr. Reed's address."

As the door closed behind him, Mrs. Travers stood a moment or two in thought.

"There is a change somewhere; is it in him or in myself? He seemed a shade presumptuous, or have I forgotten the equality that once existed between him, myself, and my mother? I think not; but I cannot go back to the old state—and though I will be kind and helpful, he must see in me only the widow of his late employer, only the present head of the house of Travers."



CHAPTER IV.

HE Euston Terminus was all alive, and a goodly army of porters ready to disentangle the passengers' luggage, with small regard to its well-

being, one bright but sharp afternoon in early spring, as the 3.30 train from H—— rushed into the station, and the crowded carriages disgorged an eager, pushing, striving mob.

Through its eddies a gentleman who had been waiting about for a few minutes before the train came in dexterously elbowed his way. Looking sharply into all the first-class carriages, he suddenly paused at one of the second-class, from which a fat female with a huge basket had just emerged, and raised his

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hat. "Miss Lee," he said; "if I am not much mistaken, Fanny Lee."

"Yes, yes," said a young lady, disentangling herself from a chaos of children, band-boxes, and brown-paper parcels; and, putting her hand in his, she stepped out into the light. They stood looking at each other for a moment, as if trying to recall some halfvanished memory. The girl saw a gentlemanlike-looking man, moderately tall, very slight, with dark hair, a spare, expressive face, exceedingly keen dark eyes, and a halfkindly, half-mischievous smile on his cleanshaved lips. He was remarkably well dressed, and wore a sprig of lily-of-the-valley in his button-hole. Indeed, he might have passed for a man of fashion, were it not for the expression of alertness, of bright intelligence, that pervaded every line of his countenance and, I had almost said, figure.

She was a little, delicate-looking creature, wrapped in a shapeless waterproof, above which, and shaded by a very indifferent hat, appeared a pretty oval face, with soft brown eyes and a quantity of pale brown hair, not very neatly or fashionably arranged.

The mutual survey scarce lasted a second when it was abruptly terminated by a hasty shove from a heavily-laden porter, which sent the young lady almost into her companion's arms; but, quickly recovering herself, she exclaimed, "Is it possible you are Tom Reed?"

"Quite possible," replied the gentleman, drawing her hand through his arm. "Do you doubt it? Come, let us see about your luggage. I suppose you have four or five trunks, three or four packages, a couple of bonnet boxes, and——"

"Oh, dear no!" a little sadly, though with a smile. "I have but two in the world."

"What a delightful girl to travel with! Have they any special signs?"

"No, no—just my name. There!"—convulsively—"that man is going away with one of them." As she spoke Mr. Reed darted upon him, and rescued No. 1; the other was quickly discovered.

"Now, then! I am afraid that we must take a four-wheeler. Here, cab!"—as though he was monarch of every conveyance that ever paid for a licence; so his companion thought, as he quickly but carefully handed her in, saw the luggage placed, and finally jumped in after her.

"And so you are little Fanny," he said, as

they got into the comparative quiet of Gower Street, looking straight into her eyes. "I should have known you anywhere. But somehow I fancy you had rosier cheeks at the old parsonage. You are all right, are you? No cold or nervous debility—that's the last dodge, I believe?"

"I am very well," said the young lady; "but not quite so bright as I used to be with poor grandpapa." She sighed and smiled. "And I have had some hard work in Yorkshire. Hard work never suited me, you know. But, there—I cannot hear what you say, and I can't scream. Shall we stop soon?"

"Presently. Let me put up the window. Have you no shawl or wrap?—it's cold, though so bright."

And they rattled on; occasionally the newly-arrived would utter a word as with a note of interrogation, "Regent Street?"

- "No; Oxford Street."
- "Opera House?"
- "No; Covent Garden."

Twice Mr. Reed called to the driver to hasten, and at last they reached Waterloo.

"Train for Hampton Court?"

- "Just gone, sir."
- "Next?"
- "Not till 5.30."
- "By Jove! an hour and a half to wait. Come, Fanny, you look famished. There's soup or something to be had, and a glass of sherry."
- "Thank you, I will take a bun or a biscuit. I have not had anything since seven o'clock this morning."
- "No wonder I miss the roses; roses don't flourish under such an ethereal régime." And the weary traveller was soon summoned to the refreshment-room, where soup, sherry, a table in a quiet nook, a devoted waiter, seemed ready as by magic—the magic of Tom Reed's good-humoured authority and contagious activity.

His young protégée, glancing at the very perfect minutiæ of his costume, drew off her own dingy and not neatly-mended gloves with a laugh and a blush, which became her greatly.

"Well, Tom," she said, "you might have known me, but I am sure I should never have known you in such nice clothes."

"Clothes!" echoed Tom Reed, stretching

out one arm, and regarding it with an expression of uneasiness. "Do you call these clothes?"

"What are they, then?"

"Dress," he replied, with much solemnity.

"The porters here, and your friends in Yorkshire, probably clothe themselves. "I dress."

He waited till the pleasant laugh with which she heard him was passed, and asked gravely, "And what incongruity do you observe between my garments and myself?"

"Oh, you look all right now," she returned; "but when we met last, you know, you had not an unbroken garment, as you call it, in the world. Though I was such a little thing, I remember poor Mrs. Green, the housekeeper, for ever lamenting that Master Tom never was fit to be seen. What a mischievous boy you were!"

"Do you remember all that? Why, it must be ten years ago! Well, little cousin," a very kindly, soft expression stealing over his face, "nothing has pleased me half so much for many a day as this plan of Mrs. Travers to have you with her. You will be quite comfortable."

"Do you think so?" a little anxiously, while she held a spoonful of soup midway to

its destination. "It is so long since I saw her, and people change."

"She does not," emphatically. "She is a thorough-going brick—a splendid creature altogether."

"I was very fond of her as a child; but then she was always so much with her mother and grandpapa, that we were never quite play-fellows; and she is four or five years older than I am."

"Did you know the late lamented Travers?" asked Tom.

"I remember often seeing him, but I do not think I ever spoke to him. He was frightfully rich, wasn't he?"

"Delightfully, you mean. Yes, and I believe your old friend has it all now. Well, I suspect she earned it. He was a fine fellow, the type of the 'grand old English merchant,' but I fancy a trifle jealous and exacting; all Kate's old friends politely warned off the premises. I met her very unexpectedly, about two years ago, at a gorgeous banquet in Westbourne Terrace; she was delighted to have a talk over the old place and people, so I went to call, was presented to the proprietor, and asked to another gorgeous banquet, where I nearly died of starvation."

Fanny opened her pretty brown eyes in amazement.

"Moral and mental starvation, I mean. After that I saw no more of our friend. Next I saw the death of old Travers in the *Times*, and a fortnight or so after, I had a note from her, asking me to call; when I did, I found she wanted to know where you were, and how you were placed. I was ashamed, my dear girl, to be able to tell so little; but I had a clue, and so she found you out."

"And then I had to give a month's notice; and even after that, could scarce get away."

"All's well that ends well," said Reed, rising. "I am sure you will be as happy as—as a pet fairy! so make yourself comfortable. I imagine I might get the tickets now."

The young lady sat very quietly in deep, and, from her expression, not unpleasant thought—enjoying, as she well might, emancipation from a comfortless school-room, a troop of noisy, ill-mannered, and not particularly good-natured children, whose exacting mamma looked upon her as a bondmaid, for whom there existed no chance of manumission.

She had drawn on her shabby gloves again, and had just begun to expect Cousin Tom back, when he returned, and, taking his arm, they sallied forth to seek their train. As they passed the second class refreshmentroom, a very seedy-looking individual issued from it; a short, thin, red-faced man, with a dingy, battered white hat, a cut-away coat with baggy pockets, and palpably burst-out boots. Yet he had a hand thrust into one of the pockets, and a short stick protruding therefrom, and wore his miserable hat with an indescribable slant, as though the "tone of the turf would hang round him still." This unattractive figure placed himself exactly in their way.

"Tom Reed!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse, unsteady voice. "Mr. Reed—I don't think I am mistaken."

Tom Reed looked at him, as if puzzled for a moment, and then said, "Why, it can't be Trapes?"

"The same, sir! All that's left of him. And how are you, Reed? World's been going pretty square with you?" continued his curious acquaintance, staring boldly at Fanny, and seemingly resolved on a talk.

"Oh, pretty well, thank you," returned

Tom civilly; "but we are barely in time for our train."

"Good five minutes to spare if you are for Hampton Court. I say, old fellow, I want to talk with you. I have lost sight of you this age past. Where can I find you?"

"Oh, the old place—M. T. office."

"Still there! Well, I don't care to call," screwing up his left eye, knowingly. "I'll drop you a line."

"All right—good morning," cried Tom, hurrying his companion on, and into a firstclass carriage.

"What a dreadful man! How could you know him?"

"Poor, unfortunate devil!" returned Tom thoughtfully. "A few years ago he was a sort of fine gentleman I half envied."

"Did he lose his money, poor man?" asked Fanny compassionately. "Still he need not look quite so dreadful."

"No, certainly not;" and then Tom Reed turned the conversation and devoted himself to cheering up the pretty little cousin under his care.

But Fanny was nervous, and could not conceal it. Her sweet, slight nature had been too much tried by the sudden change from her grandfather's loving indulgence to the rugged discipline of her Yorkshire penitentiary. She was too unhinged to look forward brightly, now that hope had come—as fatigue sometimes banishes sleep.

Tom Reed felt her slight arm tremble, as he drew it through his own to conduct her the short distance that intervened between the station and the Travers mansion.

It was a clear frosty evening, a young moon showing coldly bright in the deep blue sky.

"What a pretty place!" said Fanny, looking round her timidly. "Will Kate—I mean Mrs. Travers—always live here?"

"It is hard to say; but I fancy not," returned Mr. Reed. "There, you see those tall wrought-iron gates?—that is our destination."

A few moments more, and Fanny found herself upon the threshold in a flood of light, and in the tender embrace of her old friend, who seemed to her at once strange and familiar. The sudden warmth and glow of kindness was nearly too much for poor Fanny, whose bright eyes, half sad, half mischievous, were dimmed, while her lip quivered.

"Dear child, you are quite tired out; come with me to your room," cried Mrs. Travers,

observing her emotion. "Mr. Reed, you will find the Times and magazines in the drawingroom—if I may offer any literary attraction to one of the initiated? So much obliged to you for bringing me this dear little waif. Come, Fanny;" and the rescued bondmaid was swept upstairs to a charming room, next to Mrs. Travers's, where a ruddy fire, fresh chintz hangings, a dressing-table all pink and white muslin, a dainty little white bed, looked welcome most pleasantly and impressively. "How cold and pale you look!" said Mrs. Travers, assisting to take off her cloak. ("And how shabby," she thought.) "Still, it is the same little Fanny, and will bloom out soon again with the roses of former years under my care, I hope." Here the respectable Mrs. Mills entered with a can of hot water. "Do you not remember Mills, Fanny?"

"Of course I do! And, Mills, do you not remember me?" cried Fanny, seizing her hand and kissing her withered cheek; a piece of spontaneous kindliness that bound Mills to her from that moment.

"Dear, dear! to think that this is little Miss Fanny!—grown quite a woman, I do declare."

"Yes, it is astonishing; yet we could not

expect her to stand still," remarked Mrs. Travers. "Now, dinner will be ready in a few minutes, and I dare say Mr. Reed is quite ready for it. When he leaves, we shall have plenty of time to talk together; and how much we have to tell each other!"

"Indeed, we have; but, dear Kate,—I mean Mrs. Travers,—you are quite different from what I remember you—older looking and better looking; and yet the same."

"It is well you have qualified 'older looking,' little one, with 'better looking,' or I should prepare to be awful! I will leave you to dress, or not, as you like; and when you join us in the drawing-room, dinner will be ready——"

"How did you recognize each other?" asked Mrs. Travers, as she dispensed the filletted soles.

"Well, we jumped at each other," returned Reed, setting down his glass of sherry with an air of discriminating satisfaction. "As I glanced into the chaos of bundles, bandboxes, and babies in which she was engulfed, a vision of a silvery trout-stream, a sensation of terror and wet feet, much exultation, a trifle of conscience and a large proportion of gratitude,

associated a slight young lady in a water-proof with a certain great deliverance, wrought by her opportune warning in days of yore, and memory whispered, 'That's she!"

"Yes, yes, I remember it," cried Fanny, who had already revived marvellously under the benign influences around her; "and I think grandpapa was equally relieved. He had solemnly declared he would flog you if he caught you poaching; and I knew quite well he did not want to catch you, so I slipped away out by the Beech Wood, and gave you notice. It was quite as much for his sake as yours." A pretty little defiant nod closed her speech.

"Did Fanny know you?" asked Mrs. Travers.

"That is a doubtful point. According to her, the general excellence of my attire militated against my identity."

"Well, Mr. Reed, I must say that my recollection of you in days of old does not hold you up as the glass of fashion or the mould of form."

"No, indeed; you were a dreadful pickle; yet how fond poor dear grandpapa was of you," added Fanny.

"He was far kinder than I deserved," re-

turned Tom Reed, with momentary gravity; and dinner proceeded without anything further than newspaper talk till dessert banished their attendant.

"I cannot tell you what pleasure it gives me to see you both," said Mrs. Travers, permitting Tom Reed to fill her bubble-like glass with claret. "Besides the pleasure of meeting old, and I think congenial friends, the relief from the sense of isolation that has oppressed me since—since my widowhood, is wonderfully delightful. I have never been very fond of Christmas since I grew up, but this one I spent quite alone. The people on either side here were very good in calling and leaving 'Kind inquiries;' but of course they are total strangers to me. So all I could do was to give the servants a good dinner, and let them invite their friends. They sent me up a piece of their pudding at my luncheon, and, by avoiding a late dinner, I managed to forget it was Christmas Day. I hope I shall not spend another like it."

"No, no, we must change all that," said Reed cheerfully. "And may I ask how are all your affairs progressing? When I saw you last week, you were experiencing some difficulty with Wall and Wreford. They objected to your rather munificent suggestion of sharing your fortune with Sir Hugh Galbraith."

"Yes; Mr. Wall would not hear of it, which rather surprised me. I fancied he was annoyed at Mr. Travers leaving all his money away from Sir Hugh. Now I observe he is not so great a favourite. Still, Hugh had evidently been taught to look upon himself as poor Mr. Travers's heir, and I think he has been badly treated; nor have I a doubt that the missing will would have given him a share of the property could we but find it."

"Still, to go halves with him voluntarily," said Reed, smiling, "was slightly Quixotic, if you will not quarrel with me for saying so."

"I do not think it was," returned the young widow thoughtfully, "Fifteen hundred or two thousand a year, all my own, are great riches to me; but by no means such wealth to Sir Hugh, with a position to keep up, and I suppose the usual costly tastes and habits of his class. In fact, but for the fear of being thought idiotic, and outrunning Mr. Travers's real wishes, I would willingly have given Sir Hugh the lion's share."

[&]quot;And what decision have you arrived at?"

"Oh, Mr. Wall would hear of nothing beyond a third of the whole being offered; and you must remember we do not yet know what the whole will be. Mr. Wall rather startled me by saying that too much munificence might suggest that the real will was more favourable to Sir Hugh than I liked, and therefore not lost, but suppressed! Do you think the general colour of men's minds of so vile a tint as to distort so basely a simple wish to do right?"

"What a horrible idea!" cried Fanny, who was listening with deep attention.

"I have by no means a bad opinion of my fellow-creatures. Still, they are inclined to attribute very base motives for acts they cannot understand or account for," replied Tom Reed. "I heartily wish the second will could be found; but I suspect something or other occurred to renew Mr. Travers's displeasure with his cousin, and, thinking it too favourable, he destroyed it."

"No, Tom, no!" cried Mrs. Travers with animation. "You must forgive me," she said, interrupting herself and smiling; "but when eager or in earnest the old name comes so readily to my lips."

"I shall not forgive you, my dear Mrs. vol. I. 5

Travers, if you go back to the newer and colder appellation. Pray let me be Tom, who is quite as anxious and proud to be your servant and ally now as in our old poaching days." There was a tinge of earnestness under this pleasant, airy manner, very acceptable to the fair but lonely widow.

"So be it," she said, laughing, "I accept you as Tom, and my champion to boot. But to return. I do not think Mr. Travers ever destroyed his will. I should more readily believe he had not made a second, but that it seems so positively proved he did. I confess I have felt at times a strange uneasiness about it, but have now made up my mind that, even if found, it will make no material difference—Sir Hugh will probably have a handsome legacy, but the bulk of the fortune and all authority Mr. Travers has no doubt left to me."

"That is highly probable," observed Tom Reed. "Where is this Galbraith?"

"Somewhere in India. He was, I believe, on the point of coming to England when the Mutiny broke out. Indeed, he was at Calcutta on his way, but he immediately returned to join the remnant of his regiment, the —th Light Dragoons, which was nearly cut to

pieces at the beginning of the outbreak. I have seen his name mentioned once or twice as a very gallant officer; but I fancy he is a thorough aristocrat—brave enough, but proud and overbearing, and unjust. His letter to Mr. Travers on our marriage was almost unpardonable. Oh, the contempt with which he spoke of me!"

"And why, I should like to know!" exclaimed Fanny indignantly. "I am sure you are as good as he is?"

"That depends on the exact meaning attached to goodness," said Mrs. Travers, smiling. "I can afford to forgive him, because he did not know what he was writing about. Indeed, I imagine these high-caste men know nothing thoroughly."

"Why, Mrs. Travers, you are quite democratic!" said Tom Reed.

"Dear me!" cried Fanny with some awe, "I suppose Sir Hugh Galbraith is of a very old family indeed."

"So old as to be lost in the mists of antiquity. His ancestors did heaps of mischief on the border in bygone days, and no particular good, I daresay. Notwithstanding the difference in their ages, Sir Hugh and poor Mr. Travers were cousins. I think my husband acted as a sort of guardian to Sir Hugh. Yes, Fanny, he is a very great man indeed—a tiny acorn on the topmost twig of the family tree. Still, I should not like him to suffer from his cousin's partiality for me. Generosity may be an aristocratic virtue; I am content with more homely justice, and will try to practise it."

"And the upshot of all this is——" put in Tom interrogatively.

"That Messrs. Wall and Wreford have written by my direction to inform Sir Hugh how matters stand; that it is my intention, as soon as they can be arranged, to make over to him a third of the fortune bequeathed to me. I cannot help imagining he will refuse to accept, estimating me as he does; but Mr. Wall says he is a poor man, every acre of the few left mortgaged up to the gate of the family fortalice, for it can hardly be called castle."

"He has made a great ass of himself," said Reed, "and is in luck to find such a residuary legatee as yourself; you certainly give the best refutation to his insolence by your generous conduct."

After some more conversation about the happy old days at Cullingford, Tom Reed,

observing his cousin's pale cheek and drooping eyes, bid the ladies "Good evening."

"Do you know I like that cousin of yours so much, Fanny!" cried Mrs. Travers as the door shut upon her departing guest. "There is an undercurrent of good feeling with all his lightness and careless ease."

"I was so surprised to see him quite a fine gentleman."

"A fine gentleman! My dear Fanny, you must not use opprobrious terms in speaking of your cousin. I believe he is a good fellow, which is a different affair altogether. And now, dear child, you look quite worn out. You must go to bed. Tell me, do you feel as if you would be happy and at home with me? I want you to feel so. I am grieved to think I was obliged to lose sight of you for a while. Did you think I had forgotten you, Fanny?"

Fanny's frank bright eyes filled up suddenly. "Yes, Kate, I did; and oh! I cannot tell you how desolate and miserable I was. I felt that if you could forget me, there was no help anywhere."

Mrs. Travers was silent for an instant; then, throwing her arms round her young friend, exclaimed, "There! let us not talk about it any more. You know now I did not, that I could not help it; and for the future you may trust me."

"I am sure I can!" cried Fanny, returning her embrace with much warmth. "And oh, Kate! what a lovely house you have; and what beautiful flowers and things! Are they all really yours? I feel half-frightened to hear you order about that polite gentleman who waited on us at dinner."

"Ah! the change in my exterior life is as nothing to the change within. But come, dear, to bed—to bed—to bed!"



CHAPTER V.

HE two months which succeeded Fanny Lee's arrival at her friend's house were certainly the happiest either lady had known for a long

time. To Mrs. Travers the sense of freedom, at first suppressed partly by her tender and respectful regret for her deceased husband, and still more by her shrinking from her own natural feelings as unseemly, gained more strength each day.

While to Fanny the glorious consciousness of having nothing to do but disport herself in the sunshine Fortune had suddenly shed upon her, was enough delight for the present.

She played and sang prettily, and worked all sorts of fancy-work neatly and tastefully; but it was wonderful to watch the varied changes she performed in the course of the day—from the piano to her work-table, from the work-table to the garden (weather permitting), from the garden to a sudden and complete re-arrangement of her own room or Mrs. Travers's, or an enthusiastic compilation of a cap for Mills. It quite fidgetted her to see Mrs. Travers reading steadily for a couple of hours with rapt attention, answering her many questions with unswerving good temper, though often at random. At first, the graver of the two friends tried to preach fixity of purpose, but in vain, and so wisely and quietly gave up the attempt; finding that, although the effort to inculcate first principles was hopeless, whatever she gave Fanny to do as a task for her, was most faithfully performed.

Then, when a rare bright day came, how delightful it was to order the carriage and enjoy a drive in the beautiful country which surrounds Hampton Court! Tom Reed was a great addition to the pleasure of their life. He was a frequent visitor, and was always considered due on Sundays, when he generally arrived armed with *Punch* and the latest

numbers of the best periodicals. Then Mrs. Travers enjoyed hearing the latest political rumours, and a little discussion of the various new opinions perpetually cropping up. Tom Reed, as he was universally called, was a very agreeable companion-bright, keen, accustomed to focus his thoughts, which, if not profound, were shrewd, and sharpened by constant friction with other minds as bright and often deeper than his own; accustomed by his position on the staff of a high-class morning paper to observe the conflicting currents radiating from the old centres of For Fanny he generally brought belief. curious and valuable morsels of fashionable intelligence, perhaps not so carefully authenticated as they ought to have been, but not the less acceptable on that account. To Reed this easy admittance into the society of two refined and accomplished women, the delightful, graceful homeliness—if such a combination of terms may be used—of the old-fashioned house at Hampton Court, was wonderfully delightful and wholesome. For Tom had had his evil times and trials, and had run the not uncommon round of spending all his money in finding out how to make more.

To Fanny he seemed a fearfully clever, bril-

liant, sceptical, scornful man of fashion, whose wicked theories she constantly set herself to contradict and subvert. Many were the stinging little darts she contrived to launch against the pachydermatous Tom, so that a sparring match between the cousins was generally one of the evening's amusements.

The next-door neighbours, too, were sym-The woes of a rich widow were pathetic. naturally attractive to an impecunious honourable, whose husband, though not defunct, was "nowhere" in the world of fashion and respectability. Many were the invitations pressed upon the friends by the Hon. Mrs. Danby and her daughters; but though Fanny Lee often availed herself of these opportunities to cultivate the great world, Mrs. Travers, rigidly intent on showing respect to her husband's memory, invariably refused. An amiable readiness to lend her carriage to the honourable mother and her graceful brood amply compensated for the lack of personal inter-Various were the scraps of intelligence collected by Fanny during her visits: sometimes it was a titbit of Palace gossip, for Mrs. Danby's ostensible attraction to Hampton Court was a "relative" located in that refuge of impoverished aristocracy. Oftener

it was some scandal touching the High Church curate, and oftenest military reports.

- "Do you know, Kate," she burst out one day after a drive to Kingston with Mrs. Danby and one of her daughters, "that the officer who is coming here instead of Major Cunliffe is a Captain or Colonel Upton; he is a brother officer of Sir Hugh Galbraith, and Mrs. Danby used to know Sir Hugh long ago, and says he was the most tiresome, overbearing man that ever lived, so——"
- "I trust and hope, Fanny, that you did not speak unadvisedly with your lips, or launch out into abuse of my enemy!" cried Mrs. Travers, interrupting her. "I am most anxious that no syllable of depreciation should be traced to me or mine."
- "I am sure I did not; or at any rate, if I said anything, it was not much," said Fanny, colouring guiltily.
- "I am quite sure you did," said Mrs. Travers, smiling, though annoyed. "Confess, now, that no devil was ever painted blacker than you depicted poor Sir Hugh."
- "No, no, indeed!" exclaimed Fanny earnestly. "I think I did say that, from all I could learn, Sir Hugh Galbraith was an unforgiving, vindictive, insolent, greedy, disagreeable man."

"And that is not much," said Mrs. Travers resignedly. "Well, in future, my dear girl, will you kindly keep silence even from bad words, if Sir Hugh's name is mentioned?"

"I will indeed, Kate, if you wish it. But I can tell you Mrs. Danby said three—oh! five times as much as I did, and "—lowering her voice—"she said, too, that Sir Hugh was on the point of running away with Lady Somebody, or the Countess of Something, a married woman, when her father, who was a rich solicitor, found it out, and had him arrested for debt, and so he couldn't—that is Sir Hugh; but he was so violent that it took three or four of those dreadful people—bailiffs, I think—to capture him."

"Really, that was taking a very shabby advantage of poor Sir Hugh," said Mrs. Travers laughing. "But I do not believe that long story, Fanny; depend upon it, there is but a slender foundation for such a legend."

"Well, Mrs. Danby assured me it was true; she heard it from Lord—oh, I do not know who!—who was in the same club with Sir Hugh Galbraith, and——"

"It is really no great matter, Fanny; just promise me, like a good girl, never to talk of him again."

"Very well, Kate; but I must tell you that when Mrs. Danby heard poor dear Mr. Travers was a cousin of Sir Hugh's, she seemed to know all about him at once. said, 'Dear me, I had no idea it was that Mr. Travers; and went on about his high family, and his riches, and how much she felt for you, and what a distinguished-looking woman you were, and what a pity it was for you to be lost to society, but that time would soon pass, and you could come out a little more. You cannot think what a nice feeling sort of way she spoke; and oh, Kate, she wants to know if you would kindly let her have the carriage to-morrow; she wants to go over to Kew to call on Lady de Courcy."

"I am very sorry, but she cannot have it," said Mrs. Travers, dryly. "I want to drive into town myself to-morrow. The Indian mail is in, and it is just possible Wall and Wreford may have a reply from Sir Hugh Galbraith. I do hope he will accept my offer, though I should not be surprised if he rejects it with scorn."

"What a stupid, strange man he must be!" observed Fanny.

Mrs. Travers, somewhat to her surprise, found her conjecture right. Messrs. Wall

and Wreford had received a reply to the epistle they had written little more than two months before. They evinced such a decided disinclination to let her see it, that she insisted on perusing it herself. Feeling distrustful of her own self-control, she quietly pocketed it and departed, telling Mr. Wall that she would see him after she had digested the contents.

On reaching home, Mrs. Travers felt much cheered on finding Tom assisting Fanny in some energetic amateur gardening, which was her last and most lasting whim.

"You will stay to dinner, of course?" she said. "I want a committee of the whole house to discuss Sir Hugh Galbraith's letter. Mr. Wall has told me so much: that he rejects my offer; and, knowing this, I shall take time, and fortify myself with dinner before I read it. I am sure it is odiously insulting."

"Do you know that Mr. Ford is in the drawing-room?" said Fanny, with the slightest possible grimace.

"No, indeed. What does he want? I suppose only to pay a visit. Well, I cannot ask him to stay to dinner to-day, but I will for Sunday. I could not read out Sir Hugh's letter before him. Why, I cannot tell, for he

has always been most friendly and obliging to me. So, Fanny, I will go in and see him."

Mr. Ford was deep in the *Times* when Mrs. Travers entered and greeted him kindly, yet with a nameless something of caution in her usual frank cordiality, which he did not fail to notice and interpret to the satisfaction of his immense, yet uneasy vanity.

"I trust, my dear Mrs. Travers, you will not consider me intrusive," he began.

"Certainly not, Mr. Ford. I am very glad to see you; but are you quite well? you have been suffering from cold? which is perhaps the reason you have kept so long away."

"You are very good to notice my absence when you have the society of so new and agreeable a friend as Mr. Reed." The head a little bent to one side with a jerk, "I could scarcely hope——"

"Oh, Mr. Reed is a very old friend, as well as a very pleasant one," interrupted Mrs. Travers, carelessly, and by no means in an apologetic tone. "He is a relation, you know, of dear old Mr. Lee, and was quite a playfellow of Fanny's and mine."

"Well," resumed Ford, "I have ventured to call, as I see the Indian mail is in, to ask if there is any communication from Sir Hugh Galbraith?"

"There is, indeed," replied Mrs. Travers, sitting down with a sigh; "and a very decided rejection of my offer. I am quite vexed; perhaps when he thinks better of it, he may change his mind."

"Hum! He is a great fool, that is, unless he has formed any idea that a will more favourable to himself may turn up; and, even if it does, he would probably be better off with your offer."

"I have no doubt he would," replied Mrs. Travers, slowly untying her bonnet. "I feel quite sure my husband would not have left him as much as I wish to give."

"Suppose my late respected employer was subject to crotchets like other men?" answered Ford, rubbing his hands slowly together, and putting his head slightly to one side, interrogatively. "What a cruel triumph it would be to Sir Hugh if the bulk of the property had been left to him and a mere legacy to you!"

"Why imagine anything so improbable?" replied Mrs. Travers calmly, yet with a perceptible tinge of contempt in her tone. "Mr. Travers would never have been unjust to me."

"No, no, of course not; but, after all, he must have been fallible like other men—very fallible, I should say, or he never would have used such words as But I beg your pardon, you forbade me to allude to that unhappy occurrence."

"I did," said Mrs. Travers shortly; "so you ought to avoid everything that can possibly lead up to it." She added, goodhumouredly, "And tell me now how is poor old Gregory's family getting on; you mention that he left a son and daughter not very well off?"

"His son is well to do in his way; he commands one of Duncan's ships; he sailed for China some time after his father's death: but the daughter is in bad health; she is a widow with several children, and very badly off. The brother does what he can for her, but he has a wife and children himself."

"Then, my dear Mr. Ford," cried Mrs. Travers, earnestly, "do pray see how she is, and provide what is necessary for her and the poor children. I would go and see her most willingly, but a total stranger—the widow of a man who must be to her in some degree a personage, having been her husband's employer—might be troublesome and oppressive.

Pray assure her of my sympathy and readiness to help her. I know Mr. Travers would have done so. He valued poor old Mr. Gregory very much, and I feel quite sure he would approve what I propose."

"Certainly," said Mr. Ford, in a suppressed and rather choked tone. "Certainly," he repeated, clearing his throat; "Gregory was a very faithful servant—and—and—your amiable, generous readiness to relieve misfortune touches me to the heart."

"I imagine the power to relieve suffering, even in a slight degree, is too great a luxury not to require self-control as much as any other enjoyment," returned Mrs. Travers, carelessly; while she thought, "How like an old-fashioned novel he talks!"

"It is only one more token of that excellence long ago recognised by me," resumed Mr. Ford, throwing out his hand, which held a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, as though about to throw down his gage to all comers in defence of the young widow's amiability and generosity.

"Well, well!" she exclaimed good-humouredly, "I cannot allege the favourite excuse for keeping one's money in one's purse, for I have very few claims upon me. But,

Mr. Ford, when sufficient time has elapsed to assure my authority under Mr. Travers's will, you, too"—she hesitated, blushed, and showed a charming gracious confusion—"you, too, shall find that I am not ungrateful for the friendship you have always shown us both."

"My dear madam—my dear Mrs. Travers, you are very good; but you must be aware that there are free-will services, which to pay——"

"Would be the cruellest insult," interrupted "Certainly I should indeed Mrs. Travers. be 'of the earth, earthy' if I knew it not. But, Mr. Ford, I am not without my ambi-If the house of Travers really passes into my hands, I should like to keep it up, to increase its prestige, to renew its youth; to prove to the world—my husband's world that I am no unworthy inheritor of his name and fortune." She rose as she spoke, and began almost unconsciously to move to and fro. "And in the pursuit of such an object might I not also do you justice, as well as prove my respect for you-my confidence in you, and improve your position? Not, I confess, that I should, unless I change considerably, like partners-even a junior partner.

should like to rule alone, but I might improve your position materially."

She paused. Mr. Ford listened eagerly as she spoke, and passed his handkerchief rapidly over his face.

"You are quite a mercantile Portia," he said, in a thick, husky tone, that cleared as he proceeded. "It is remarkable to observe the natural enthusiasm of youth directing itself into such a channel."

"Ah! you despise my youth," she cried, pausing, and leaning against the back of a chair, while a delicate colour stole over her cheek, for it takes long experience to steel the soul against a sneer. "But, you must remember, I am older than my years; that I have studied to be old, and almost succeeded."

"Your ambition is, I am sure, worthy of all respect," returned Ford; but he dragged out his words with a visible effort. A short silence ensued, and Ford resumed: "Then Sir Hugh Galbraith shows himself quite inimical to your just rights, as they at present appear?"

"Yes—quite—nay, he threatens to contest the will; indeed, Mr. Wall seems to think he has some idea that another exists. I have not yet seen the letter. Suppose," continued Mrs. Travers with the odd sort of restless desire to get rid of him which generally came over her—"suppose you come and dine here on Sunday, and we will talk it all over. I am sure you will be interested; and more, if necessary, you will help me to fight this man."

She smiled very sweetly upon Ford as she spoke. He made a slight sudden movement towards her, which he dexterously turned into typical hand-washing, and began to speak with eagerness.

"You know well;" then checking himself, he recommenced—"You may, indeed, count on me; and, insignificant as I seem, I may possess more power than you think. Be that as it may, I believe you know the deep interest, the—the—friendship, if you will accept the expression, that I entertain for you; and whatever course you may decide upon, I shall be at your service, with or without reward. That is a matter on which I do not dare allow my thoughts to dwell."

"No, no! I am sure you do not," returned Mrs. Travers with complimentary readiness, quite heedless of his dramatic emphasis, her mind preoccupied by the letter she longed, yet half feared, to read. "You are much above any personal considerations; but you shall not find me ungrateful, I assure you; so," holding out her hand, "do not forget Sunday. We dine at five on Sundays."

Ford's countenance darkened, and his smile, as he accepted his dismissal, was very snaky.

"And, oh, Mr. Ford, be sure you see poor Mrs. Bell, old Gregory's daughter. I wish you would send me her address."

"I will do so," he replied; and, bowing stiffly, departed.

"There is something the matter with that man," thought the young widow, as she walked towards her dressing-room. "He is changed in some way; but he is a very good fellow. He must be—he always has been—and why should he change! I wonder why I am always so glad when he is gone!"

Dinner passed less agreeably than usual, for the three friends were oppressed by the anticipated unpleasantness of Sir Hugh's letter. Tom Reed did considerably the largest share of the talking. At last the more solid portion of the repast was cleared away; the grave and discreet Edwards gave the final touch to the dessert dishes, which perfected their mathematical precision, and departed.

"Now or never, Mrs. Travers—courage! Take a glass of sherry, and open the fatal scroll."

"Oh, I am quite equal to the occasion without such extraneous aid," returned Mrs. Travers smiling, as she drew forth the letter and opened it slowly. "What a horrible hand! but cruelly firm. It has evidently been dashed off in hot haste. I must glance through it before I read aloud." (Reed and Fanny naturally looked at their hostess as her eyes eagerly scanned the page. the quick colour flushed up to her brow, then faded away as rapidly, and left her almost pale. When she came to the end she laid it down for an instant with a slight, bitter "Listen to this!" she exclaimed, smile.) taking it up again, and proceeding to read in a clear, quiet voice :---

"GENTLEMEN,

"I am in receipt of yours of —, announcing the death of my cousin, Mr. Richard Travers, and the liberal intentions of his widow towards me. Be so good as to inform your client that I am not disposed, by accepting obligations from her, to imply approbation of the deplorable weakness which

disgraced the close of my unfortunate relative's life. I think it right to add a report that another and a very different will is in existence has reached me. I am on the point of starting for England, to ascertain, as far as possible, the truth, and, in any case, to try if the law can uphold a will so infamously unjust, and made evidently under the undue influence of a lady whose antecedents could not have exactly fitted her to be Mr. Travers's adviser. I, therefore, prefer claiming my possible rights to sharing the spoil with her, and beg that I may receive no further propositions on the subject.

"I have the honour to be, gentlemen, &c., &c., "Hugh Galbraith."

When Mrs. Travers ceased reading, she looked up at her listeners and kept silence.

"What a bitter bad temper the man must have been in when he wrote that!" cried Tom Reed.

"I am sure he is a detestable, ungrateful thing!" added Fanny.

"You see Wall was not so far wrong when he said that too liberal an offer might suggest an idea of being bought off," continued Reed.

"To a mind of Sir Hugh's calibre, perhaps,"

said Mrs. Travers slowly, with her eyes still fixed on the letter. "See," she went on, handing it over to Reed, "he had written 'woman' before 'lady,' and put his pen through it, not liking, I suppose, to be conventionally rude."

"Yes, yes, I see," he replied, as he glanced over Sir Hugh's effusion. "A most unwarrantable letter—ungentlemanlike, even. You really deserve some credit for taking it so calmly."

"Do I?" returned Mrs. Travers. take it calmly? If it ever happens that I can pay my debt to Sir Hugh, he will not fare the better for my calmness! What have I ever done to deserve such treatment? That he should be hurt and disappointed by my husband's will I am not surprised; but does he think Mr. Travers had not a right to marry anyone he liked? And why should I be so distasteful to Sir Hugh Galbraith? Surely he does not fancy that we are still in the feudal ages, when humble birth was more disgraceful than misconduct? Why should he disdain me without knowing me? Pooh! Why do I trouble myself with such conjectures? What is he and his contempt to me? I can well afford to despise both."

She had spoken with repressed vehemence, and stopped abruptly. Reed looked up earnestly, as if struck by her tone, and Fanny exclaimed:

"And I daresay you are just as well born!
I always heard your father——"

"Nonsense, Fanny," interrupted Mrs. Travers. "I only know and acknowledge my mother's relations, who are of the people. The only help we ever had was from cousin Hicks, and poor cousin Hicks was not a model of good breeding; but I do not think he would have attributed such an offer as mine to a desire to preserve the lion's share of the spoil."

"He certainly never would be such an idiot as to refuse a good offer and run his head against the *chevaux-de-frise* of the law, as Sir Hugh threatens; but it is a mere threat! When he arrives in England he will find out how absurd any attempt to shake your position would be."

"I suppose he will, Tom," returned Mrs. Travers. "Still, this man will give me trouble and pain. He has been wronged, and I cannot make it right. Try and throw it back as I will, his scorn hurts me; the material superiority of my position hurts me. You may laugh, Tom; but I should like to

give him his choice of weapons and beat him in a fair fight. My money is my weak point."

"Long may you continue to suffer from such weakness!" exclaimed Reed fervently. "You really are the most chivalrous lady I have ever had the pleasure of meeting."

"Oh, I daresay you think me very silly—but I am what I am. He says he is coming to England. I feel that his arrival will be the beginning of troubles."

"I am sure I wish some one would give him a bear's hug and finish him," cried Fanny indignantly. "Never mind, Kate! He cannot take away everything from you, as he would like, I daresay. So you must try and forget him and be happy. Do not let him vex you."

"I shall try and follow your advice, dear," returned Mrs. Travers smiling, and resuming her usual tone, as the indignant colour which had mounted to her cheek faded away. "Come, let us go into the drawing-room; and, to turn our thoughts, suppose we plan out that little tour I have projected for the summer?"

Accordingly the three friends adjourned into the pleasant, perfumed drawing-room, where "Bradshaw" and "Murray" helped them to much lively talk and delightful plans.

Mrs. Travers was unusually bright, and Sir Hugh seemed forgotten.

But long after Tom Reed had bid goodnight, and Fanny Lee's bright eyes were closed in sleep, Mrs. Travers sat thinking, with her elbows on her dressing-table, and her chin resting on her hands, till her candle was burnt down in the socket; and then she started up, extinguished it, and opening the shutter, brushed out her long, chestnut-brown hair in the cold moonlight.



CHAPTER VI.

HE next Sunday was one of those bright soft days that seem stolen from a riper season, just as a sample of the delights which more advanced spring

has in store. Already the almond and lilac trees showed attempts at budding, the crocuses and violets made a respectable show in the garden, and Mrs. Travers's rooms were sweet with hyacinths.

Thither, in Sunday garb of most irreproachable cut and hue, with tightly-buttoned, handsomely-stitched gloves, and a silk umbrella rolled into the dimensions of a walking-stick, came Ford. He first loomed upon Fanny's active vision at church, and she, with

her usual impulsiveness, bestowed an energetic nudge upon her friend, who was busied in finding the hymn just given out; but Mrs. Travers was not unaccustomed to Fanny's nudges, and did not even lift her eyes from her book.

On coming out of church, the Hon. Mrs. Danby pounced upon Mrs. Travers, for whom she had lain in wait; for the young widow generally kept back till the rest of the congregation had partially dispersed.

"How do you do, my dear Mrs. Travers? I was glad to see you in church, for Georgey and I fancied, from not seeing you anywhere, that you were not so well—cold or something. It is such uncertain, trying weather."

"Oh, I am perfecty well, thank you," replied Mrs. Travers cheerfully.

"Suppose we walk on?"

Here Mr. Ford drew near, looking slightly embarrassed, yet determined.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Travers; then, holding out her hand, "Good morning, Mr. Ford; I did not expect to see you in church. Fanny, here is Mr. Ford!"—and Fanny felt he was committed to her care.

Mrs. Danby and her daughter looked at him with an instant's short, sharp curiosity, and

then the party fell into a natural marching order, the married ladies in front, the young ones, escorted by gallant Ford, in the rear. Now it is remarkable that, although speaking very correct English, with a good accent, although a well-informed and tolerably good-looking individual, both Miss Danby and her mother decided in their own minds that he was, according to their scornful generalisation, some "tinker or tailor or candlestick maker" from the City. Meantime they walked on harmoniously together.

"I want you to waive ceremony and come in to us to-morrow evening, my dear Mrs. Travers," said the honourable dame, persuasively. "There will only be my cousin, Lady Georgina Verner, her nephew Lord Delamere, who is quartered here, and Colonel Upton, who is an Indian hero just returned. You might like to meet him, for he is a great chum of your connection, Sir Hugh Galbraith. It is quite a family gathering; no party, a little music and a rubber. There could not be the slightest impropriety."

"Thank you very much," returned Mrs. Travers, gently but decidedly. "I could not think of leaving my own house for some months to come. Do not think me ungracious.

In such matters, I suppose individual feeling makes the law."

"I really think you are too scrupulous, dear Mrs. Travers. It is not wise, or even Christian, to indulge in morbid regrets, which only unfit us for the duties of that state of life to which we are called," observed Mrs. Danby, in a highly religious tone.

But Mrs. Travers was not to be moved; the prospect of meeting an old chum of Sir Hugh Galbraith was anything but attractive to her, and she politely though firmly repeated her refusal.

"Well, your charming young friend will perhaps join us?"

This Mrs. Travers left an open point, determined to ask Fanny to stay at home, as she did not at all like the idea of her "charming" but communicative young friend being brought in contact even with the enemy's most remote outpost.

The parties separated at their respective houses, and Mrs. Travers addressed herself pleasantly to Mr. Ford.

"Come in, Mr. Ford; I dare say we shall find Mr. Reed. He generally comes down on Sundays, but, I regret to say, does not appear at church."

"I must beg you to believe," returned Ford, following her into the house, "that, although compelled by railway exigencies to make my appearance at so unreasonable an hour, I do not intend to bore you all day; a walk across Bushy Park, after a week at the desk, will be a great refreshment."

"I am very happy to see you, Mr. Ford," said the young widow, simply. "Pray stroll about, or sit indoors and read, just as you like."

Contrary to Mrs. Travers's expectations, Tom Reed was not awaiting them, and luncheon proceeded much more formally in consequence. Mr. Ford was very elaborately agreeable. He conveyed all the latest news he could collect in the most polite phrases, but Fanny was rather inattentive, and disposed to watch the window opposite her, which commanded a view of the entrance; observing which, Mrs. Travers remarked, "We cannot expect Tom now, till quite late in the evening, and I do not think he will come at all."

"I dare say he will not," returned Fanny. They shortly after adjourned to the drawing-room.

"I wish," said Mrs. Travers to her companion, "you would be good-natured, and take a walk with Mr. Ford."

This was a whispered aside, while he was critically examining an illustrated work on church architecture, which the High Church curate had persuaded Mrs. Travers to buy.

"I will if you like," said Fanny, with her usual good humour. "Mr. Ford," she continued, "will you take me with you? or shall I be in your way?"

"My dear young lady, I am greatly gratified at the idea of such companionship; but shall we leave Mrs. Travers alone? Would she not join us?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Ford, I never go out on Sundays; but a brisk walk would do Fanny a world of good."

Fanny made a pretty "mow" behind Mr. Ford's back, and ran away to put on her bonnet.

"I have heard, since I had the pleasure of seeing you," said Ford, drawing his chair near Mrs. Travers, "that Sir Hugh Galbraith was to have started, or had started, from Calcutta the first of this month; so that he will probably arrive in England in about a fortnight."

"Indeed!" she replied, and then remained silent and absorbed in thought, her large dark blue eyes distended, gazing fixedly on vacancy.

Ford looked at her intently, quite unper-

ceived by her, until he suddenly rose from his chair, and executed his favourite flank movement upon the window. Then she said with a smile:

"Well, Mr. Ford, he may come or go. I must trouble myself no further about him. He has rejected my offer with more than scorn, and has evidently heard some rumour of the second will, for he threatens to dispute the first. Oh, what would I not give to find that second will, or to know certainly that it does not exist! I shall never feel really safe or settled until I am satisfied one way or the other."

"It is a painful position for you," said Ford, once more seating himself beside her; "but I think you may make up your mind that nothing more will ever be discovered, although I once knew a case somewhat in point where, after a year, the final will was found. But as to Sir Hugh's threats, they are not worth thinking of."

"So Mr. Reed tells me; and I will try not to think of them. Pray, Mr. Ford "—with an abrupt change of voice—" have you been able to see poor Mr. Gregory's daughter for me?"

"No, indeed, I regret to say," replied Ford.

"I have been much engaged since we met, but I have ascertained her address."

"Oh, thank you. Pray give it to me. Perhaps I had better call. I have much more time to spare than you, and I ought not to trouble you."

"Trouble!" repeated Ford, emphatically. "When did I ever think anything a trouble for you?"

There was a perceptible quiver in his voice. Mrs. Travers looked up quickly with a startled expression, meeting his eyes steadily.

"Oh, you may be so good as not to consider me troublesome," she said, with a certain quiet, careless composure, very refrigerating to an ardent, vain, timid man. "But I am all the more bound not to give you trouble. So let me have the address, and I shall call upon this poor woman in a day or two."

There was a tinge of command in both voice and manner that suited her well; and Ford instantly obeyed.

"There," he said, taking a slip of paper from his pocket-book. "It is not a very attractive locality, you observe." Then, after a moment's pause, "I trust I have not unwittingly offended by involuntarily falling back to the tone warranted in former, and to me, happier days." "No, no!" cried Mrs. Travers, her frank, kindly nature dreading to seem unfriendly or haughty in her prosperity. "I always remember——"

The entrance of Fanny with her bonnet on saved the impulsive widow from too fascinating an amende, though perhaps the suggestiveness of her unfinished sentence permitted a wider range to Ford's far-reaching vanity than the most unguarded words.

"Well, Miss Lee!" cried that gentleman, with head erect and sparkling eyes. "I am at your service. I dare say you can direct our steps to some pretty bits of scenery. Do you ever try any sketching? If so, and I could give you a hint or two, I should be most happy. In other days I had almost elected an artistic line, and, but for one circumstance, regret I did not."

"It would have been much nicer than doing sums all day, I am sure," returned Fanny. "Come along, Mr. Ford; it is past two."

Mrs. Travers felt unusually pleased when Ford disappeared, but was too much occupied with other thoughts than to bestow any on him. The near approach of Sir Hugh Galbraith filled her with undefinable and unreasonable uneasiness; but she made a reso-

lute and successful effort to banish him from "There is no use in going to meet her mind. trouble half way," she reflected; "he can do me no real harm." She looked at the address given her by Ford. "'Mrs. Bell, Duke's Square, Lambeth, near Vauxhall.' I will try and see her to-morrow; perhaps it is foolish and Quixotic to go myself, but it cannot be wrong; and I have so much time, and help must seem long in coming to her, poor soul." the fair widow's thoughts flowed out in benevolent plans, in half-sad, half-sweet reminis-How long she sat in luxurious solitude she did not know, when she was roused by an opening door and the announcement of "Mr. Reed."

"My dear Tom, I am so glad to see you! What became of you this morning; and how have you managed to arrive at this unusual hour?"

"Well, you see, one of 'our own correspondents' has just arrived from India. Has been with Outram at Delhi; and we were late last night, or rather this morning. The 'Morning Thresher' men gave him a supper; so he offered to drive me down, as he was coming to see some fellow he knew in India who is quartered here."

"Well, I am very glad to see you. Will you have some luncheon?"

"No, thank you; I have just finished breakfast;" and Tom Reed ensconced himself in a comfortable chair, yet seemed restless, while Mrs. Travers asked and received the news.

"What is the matter, Tom?" she said at length. "You seem on the look-out for something. "Oh, I know! I suspect you miss Fanny's attacks. She is out: she goodnaturedly undertook to guide Mr. Ford to some picturesque points; and I was not sorry to be left in peace."

"Oh, indeed, they will be back to dinner, then?"

"Yes, unless they elope; and I am sure Mr. Ford is much too proper to suggest such a thing," returned Mrs. Travers, laughing.

"Then you do not think the difficulty would arise on Fanny's side?" said Reed, a little querulously.

"Poor dear Fanny! she would inevitably box his ears if the spirit moved him so far. Under enormous excitement, I could fancy Mr. Ford on one knee exclaiming, 'A carriageand-four awaits us in the ravine; fly with me!' or some such correct incorrectness; but I cannot fancy Fan saying 'Yes.' Ah! Tom, Tom, you must put up with me, only me, for the next half-hour."

"Only you!" cried Reed. "And am I not the luckiest of dogs to have a tête-à-tête with you even for once; to have the entrée of your pleasant home-like house. Seriously, you have done me a world of good. Do you know I am crystallising into a degree of steadiness calculated to result in a millionaire condition. if I only had a trifle to begin with. As it is, I trust it may not impart a solidity to my pen which will unfit it for lighter literature."

"Do not fear. Volatility is so ingrained in you that any graver habits contracted here will be but the sponge-cake underlying the

whipt cream of your existence."

"Perhaps so," returned Tom, gravely. "All I can say is, that the cream of my existence has been very considerably whipt hitherto."

Mrs. Travers smiled. "You would not be so good a fellow if the rod of circumstance had been more sparingly applied."

"So be it; but the process has had its unpleasantness."

"No doubt. Now tell me, what wonders did 'your own correspondent' tell of his adventures in India? I daresay I have read the best of them; but a little private bit flatters one's vanity."

"Well, curiously enough, our talk all the way down here was about Sir Hugh Galbraith. Markham (that's our man) knew him well."

"You do not say so!" exclaimed Mrs. Travers, with much interest. "And what does he say of him?"

"He evidently likes him: says he is not a bad fellow—a thorough soldier; a keen sportsman; rather silent and haughty, but as plucky as a—well, as a well-bred Englishman generally is."

"Or an ill-bred one either," put in Mrs. Travers.

"Well, as an Englishman, then. Perhaps, when he comes to England, he may be induced to hear reason and do you justice."

"That I imagine he will never do," said Mrs. Travers. "How is it that he has not arrived as well as this correspondent of yours?"

"Oh, his passage was taken, I understand, but he was too ill to go on board. It seems he was rather severely wounded defending the entrance to a fort with a handful of men, to give the women and sick time to escape. I hear he is to have the Victoria Cross.

"Indeed," returned Mrs. Travers coldly; and, after a minute's silence, added, "then he can hardly be here before the end of March."

"I should think not," said Reed, rising and walking towards the window. "It is very fine, Mrs. Travers; do you not feel disposed to follow Fanny's example, and come out?"

"No, I do not, Tom," she replied, smiling; "but pray do not mind me. I see you are longing to be away—go; and if you bend your steps towards Bushy Park, you will probably meet the truants."

"Ah, you want to get rid of me!" cried Tom. "You have some delightful novel hidden away somewhere which I interfere with; so I am off." He waved his hand to his fair hostess, and ran downstairs with his usual alert rapidity.

Mrs. Travers looked after him with a kindly, half-amused smile; but though she rose and took a thick, tough-looking book from her writing-table, it lay open unread for a long time upon her knee. Partly she thought of Tom Reed's irrepressible uneasiness when he

found Fanny was absent, but more of his careless sentence, "I hear he is to have the Victoria Cross." It was curious how it ruffled the repose of her mind to hear of any worth in Hugh Galbraith - any liking towards him in others. It always seemed to reflect reproach upon her dead husband and herself—and how much she had offended in urging Mr. Travers to do him justice, no one save herself knew. It was such an effort to her to speak to Mr. Travers on any forbidden subject, and Galbraith was always tabooed. Now, all her efforts were worse than useless! Well, she had, at all events, striven to do right; and she could not help believing that her conduct would come to light some day, even if not She raised her book and strove to read. but only succeeded brokenly; disagreeable thoughts would flit between her mind and the subject before it. It was quite a relief to hear Fanny's voice on the stairs, and to receive the three pedestrians.

"I was so surprised to see Tom!" cried Fanny, as she entered. "I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw him coming along. We have had such a nice walk; have we not, Mr. Ford?"

"I should be a very strange individual to deny it," returned that gentleman, with much urbanity. "I wish we could have persuaded you, Mrs. Travers, to have joined us; I think you would have enjoyed the delicious spring feeling, the charming views."

"No doubt, Mr. Ford; but I seldom go out on Sunday. Now, dinner will be ready in five minutes, so those who wish to adorn had better do so."

* * * * *

The day but one after this conversation, Mrs. Travers, yielding to a kindly impulse, determined to seek out the old clerk's daughter herself. A deep grateful sense of happiness had been developing within her, and gradually pervading her whole being during the three months of harmonious quiet which had succeeded her husband's death. It was in vain she reproached herself for this disloyalty to his memory; in vain she told herself that her mourning should be deeper and more prolonged for him to whom she owed everything. Nature was too strong to be held back from its irrepressible germination. She felt she was young and fair; she knew she was free, rich, full to the lips with life, and she looked round, longing to bestow some of her happiness on others. Subscriptions to useful charities were all very right; but she wanted to say to some sorrowful ones, "Here, take of my abundance; let me have the supreme pleasure of drying your tears." She longed to give relief, not merely by gifts, but by the balm of personal sympathy. So she started in the most generous mood—she went alone.

"Poor old Mr. Gregory's people must be superior," she thought. "His daughter will speak more freely to me, if I am by myself." She therefore took the train to Vauxhall, and a cab from thence to the address given her by It was a better locality than she expected. The square was a large grass-plot, adorned by a few weeping-willows, fenced by wooden rails painted white, and surrounded by old-fashioned, respectable-looking red-brick The one she sought had a brass plate on the door, which announced "Mrs. Bell's establishment for young ladies." As Mrs. Travers rang, the door opened, and a stout, square-looking man, in a brown overcoat and baggy trousers, came out; he had a tall, fluffy hat that seemed to have been brushed the wrong way, and held a book with a brass clasp, out of which various papers protruded. He was followed by a small pale woman, with

a strained, imploring expression in her eyes, and hair much whiter than it ought to have been at her years. She was dressed in rusty black, and had a small, grey, knitted shawl drawn tight round her shoulders; yet was there no tinge of commonness in her aspect, nor in her accent, as she answered the man's imperative "On Monday, then, at farthest," with a low, sad-toned, "On Monday, if I possibly can;" and then continued standing, the door in her hand, as he walked away—looking with surprise at Mrs. Travers.

"I wish, if convenient to her, to see Mrs. Bell," said she, advancing and drawing a card from her case.

"I am Mrs. Bell," returned the little woman with a sigh, as if the name was identified with trouble; "walk in, if you please."

She led the way into what was evidently a schoolroom, as the front and back parlours opened into each other, and were scantily supplied with desks and forms.

"Pray sit down," continued Mrs. Bell, drawing forward the only chair in the room, which had a relaxed cane seat. "I presume you have called about my advertisement."

"No," said Kate Travers: "I was not aware of any advertisement," and she placed

her card in the little woman's thin, tremulous hand.

"Mrs. Travers!" she exclaimed in great surprise. "This is most unexpected!"—the tears stood in her eyes, and her lips quivered.

"I have taken the liberty of calling on you," said Mrs. Travers, colouring, and feeling keenly the awkwardness of venturing to intrude her knowledge of the difficulties with which this poor soul had to contend upon her notice—"because—because your late father was much respected by Mr. Travers; and had not his own illness come on so soon after Mr. Gregory's death, he would, I have no doubt, made it his business to ascertain"——she paused, at a loss how to proceed.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Bell breathlessly, her thin hands clutching nervously at her shawl.

"If he could have been of any use to you," resumed Kate Travers, clearing her difficulties at a bound; "and I have come to act for him. Will you forget I am a stranger, and speak to me openly of your affairs."

The kind, frank eyes, the sweet, modest, hesitating voice, that seemed to ask rather than to confer a favour, melted the struggling woman's heart. A sudden overpowering gleam of hope seemed to turn her giddy: she leant

her elbows on one of the desks, and, covering her face with her hands, she kept silence for one trembling moment.

"You are very, very good!" she exclaimed at length; "and I heartily thank you; but I fear, I greatly fear, it is almost too late for help."

"Do not say so," cried Mrs. Travers, feeling at ease now that the ice was broken. "I am sure, if you will confide in me, something can be done—some way of escape found."

She spoke warmly and quickly, for, without a word of explanation, she perceived that her listener was in great trouble. After a few more sentences had been exchanged, Mrs. Bell's shy reserve gave way, and, while unheeded tears welled over and stole down her sunken cheek, she told her whole story.

While her father lived with her, she was comparatively prosperous; he paid her rent, and further contributed to the cost of the little household. She had a fairly successful school, and had contrived to educate her daughter, now grown up, a son, who had evidently been a "ne'er-do-weel," whose illness and death not long before his grandfather's had helped to exhaust her scanty savings, and another boy, her youngest, who

was not yet twelve years old. But with her father she lost her mainstay. Her school fluctuated; she got behind with her rent. Her landlord had, perhaps unfortunately, been tolerably patient; she had struggled on, not liking to throw away the connection she had formed, especially as "dear Gracey" had just come home "finished" from an excellent school, where she had gained nearly all the prizes, and worked with her whole soul in order to be a help to the "dear mother" at home, and Mrs. Bell could therefore offer fresh advantages to her pupils.

Do what she would, however, the net closed round the poor woman; and, as the last chance of paying her debts and setting herself and daughter free, she had advertised her school for sale, hoping to make an existence by giving lessons, as she could no longer receive pupils. They had now nearly come to the end of all their resources—the widow's brother was at sea, had been unheard of for months—the landlord had just left, after informing her that, if not paid on Monday, he must seize her furniture.

"And all will go," concluded Mrs. Bell, who had talked herself into composure; "for, between rent and taxes, there are nearly VOL. I.

twenty-five pounds due. Then I do not know where to turn! With this house will go my last chance of independence. And there is poor Georgie; he has not been to school for three months—what is to become of him?"

"You must have courage still," said Kate, taking her hand, while sympathetic tears stood in her eyes. "The house shall not go nor the furniture."

"But, dear madam, it would take such a large sum to set me straight."

"How much?" returned Mrs. Travers,

quickly.

"Well, you see, I ought to be sure of six months' rent besides what is due, and just the little weekly bills, and a trifle of ready money for books and things. Oh, I am afraid I dare not stay on with less than seventy pounds, and that is a fortune!"

"Nevertheless, you shall have it," cried Kate Travers, impulsively—"you shall, indeed! I am certain, if my husband had known about you, he would have done as much or more."

"But, Mrs. Travers, pray think what a very large sum it is to promise! Your kind heart is moved by the story of my troubles. I should be so sorry to hurry you into anything you would regret."

"You shall have the half to-morrow," returned Kate, "and the rest in a week; so pray cheer up, and set to work to inform all your friends that your school is not to be given up; and as to your boy,"—she stopped—a list of all the institutions of which Mr. Travers had been a governor, or a benefactor, rose before her mental vision—"we must provide for his education in some way."

But her hearer was faint, and overcome by this unexpected turn of fortune. Mrs. Travers, frightened to see her look so pale, hastily rang the bell, which was immediately answered by a graceful, pretty, dark-eyed girl, a youthful picture of the faded woman who was now sobbing hysterically as she sat upon one of the forms, with her head against an ink-splashed desk. A few minutes of confusion and misunderstanding, and then the glorious news of their emancipation was made known to "Gracey," who, though preserving her composure, was evidently as much overjoyed as her mother.

"The good God has sent you to us!" she said, in a choking voice. "I have no fear of the future if we can but keep up the school,

and people always liked to send their children to mother. Then, if we can let a couple of rooms upstairs, we shall do well. Oh, you have indeed given us hope and strength!"

Kate remained some time talking over the simple plans of mother and daughter, deeply thankful that she had come herself without loss of time, and utterly winning the hearts of both by the unaffected friendliness of her interest in their projects. She could collect from their conversation that theirs had been lives of unremitting industry and humble content; no worthier recipients of her bounty could be found.

How little it cost to restore sunshine to their hearts—sunshine that reflected itself glowingly in her own!

After this visit, the pleasant monotony of Mrs. Travers's life was varied by an occasional visit to the quiet little schoolmistress and her daughter—not too many—Kate was delicately fearful of being oppressive, and in going through the forms necessary to procure admittance for her boy into one of the many institutions to which Mr. Travers had subscribed, to some of which she had also herself contributed.

Thus another month had almost slipped

by, and the promise she had made to her protégée had been faithfully fulfilled. After consultation with Mr. Ford, Kate had determined to increase her gift by an additional twenty pounds, which would not make it much more than half a year's post obit salary on account of the long and efficient services of the old clerk.

Mr. Wall had now ceased to warn his fair client that she must "just" wait; and she herself had begun to plan an early move to the Continent, beginning with Naples, and intending to work her way northward as summer advanced.

A delicious scheme, over which her fancy revelled, yet in which Fanny somehow did not seem to take as vivid an interest as might have been expected.



CHAPTER VII.



WONDER what solemnity Mr. Ford intends to perform to-day?" said Mrs. Travers, looking up from a note she was reading as she sat

at breakfast.

"Is he coming here?" asked Fanny, who was diligently spreading honey on her bread and butter.

"Yes. He says: 'A matter of deep importance induces me so to arrange my work here, as to enable me to present myself at noon, when I hope you will grant me a private interview."

"Oh, my goodness, Kate!" cried Fanny, her eyes sparkling with fun. "Depend upon

it, he is going to make you an offer, or a declaration, or whatever is the right word."

"Fanny!" said Mrs. Travers, indignantly. "How strange it is that a really nice girl as you are should be guilty of such glaring vulgarity, even in jest! Do you forget the position in which Mr. Ford stands to me? Never make such a speech again."

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Fanny, clasping her hands as if in terror. "Do not grind me quite to powder! But do you mean to say you don't know that nice, proper, polite personage is in love with you? because, if you do not, I shall begin to think I am more than your equal intellectually."

"Absurd!" returned Mrs. Travers, angrily.

"I have a sincere respect for Mr. Ford, and such remarks are insulting to him as well as to me; besides, I am vexed that you should be so regardless of all propriety—there, Fanny! I do not mean to be cross, but do not be so thoughtless again!"

"No, I will not, indeed, dearest. I know I am a wretch; but, Kate, I do not give up my opinion for all that."

"Think what nonsense you like, but do not utter it!" returned Mrs. Travers, looking to the second page of the note, in obedience to

a "P. T. O." at the foot of the first. "Listen to this, Fan: 'I saw the junior partner of Booth Brothers this morning. He had reached London only last night, having travelled from Marseilles with Sir Hugh Galbraith, though not exactly in his company.' There," continued Mrs. Travers, "I feel as if I were before the enemy, and on the point of going into action!"

"Sir Hugh absolutely in London!" cried Fanny. "Is it not sooner than we expected? 'Ill birds fly fast.'"

"No, not sooner than is quite possible," said Mrs. Travers, thoughtfully, as she laid the note beside her plate. "Our life is so serene and happy, no wonder that we take no heed of time—'is!' I fear 'has been' would be more correct! I feel quite a coward at the idea of the unrest that is before me; and an enemy is so horrible—an implacable enemy, who cannot be bought off!" she continued, smiling. "I am ashamed of my cowardice. If that man had not a sort of right to consider himself ill used, I should be braver. However, he may annoy, but he cannot hurt me!"

"Take some more coffee, and I will cut you such a nice thin slice of ham," said Fanny, soothingly.

- "No, thank you—nothing more."
- "Why, Kate, you have scarce eaten any breakfast!"
- "Never mind, I shall eat the more luncheon. And, Fanny dear, I wish you would write and ask Tom Reed to come down to dinner, if possible, to-day. I will put on my bonnet while you write, and go to the post myself—a walk will brighten my ideas and steady my nerves."
 - "Shall I go with you?" asked Fanny.
- "No. I want to think, and you would have to be silent, so you would be bored."
- "Very well," returned Fanny, good-humouredly.

Although a dull grey morning, the air and motion revived the young widow. She strove gallantly to throw off the depression and fearful looking for evil which had fallen upon her spirit; but though partially successful, she could not quite repress the sort of nervous watchfulness which constantly drew her eyes to the clock. It must be some matter of no ordinary importance that could induce Mr. Ford to leave the office in the morning, on a foreign post day, too!—then she remembered that Friday was the post day, and credited it with a reputation for unlimited ill-luck, at

which morsel of superstition reason smiled and imagination shuddered.

The first ten minutes after midday had ticked slowly by, and Mrs. Travers, though fully prepared, could not help a nervous start when "Mr. Ford" was announced

Even while exchanging the ordinary greetings, Mrs. Travers was struck by his altered appearance. His face was thinner than when she had seen him scarcely a fortnight before, and deadly pale; his eager, glittering eyes had a haggard, strange expression, which impressed her painfully.

"I fear you have been ill, Mr. Ford!" she exclaimed, almost involuntarily, as she pointed to a seat near the fire, and opposite her own.

"Ill at ease I certainly have been since yesterday," he replied, laying a square, thin brown paper parcel, folded and tied with his accustomed accuracy, on the table, and moving his chair so as to sit with his back to the light.

"I trust you have no very bad news to tell me," said Mrs. Travers, while her heart beat loudly.

"Nothing good, I acknowledge," he returned, taking out his handkerchief, and passing it rapidly over his face.

Mrs. Travers made no answer, and with a sort of choking sound in the throat, Ford resumed abruptly: "The missing will, for which we have sought so diligently—I have found it."

"Indeed!" cried Mrs. Travers, with a sensation of relief. "I am very glad."

"But, my dear lady," said Ford, lowering his voice and leaning a little forward towards her, "I—I—as an old and trusted friend, I ventured to peruse it, and——"

"Well, well, Mr. Ford," interrupted Mrs. Travers, impatiently; "I am sure you were actuated by the best motives. I do hope Sir Hugh is remembered."

"Sir Hugh!" repeated Mr. Ford in a peculiar tone. "You shall see;" and he began to untie the parcel. "I do not know," he continued, "what induced me to perhaps transgress the limits of prudence, but my deep anxiety and regard for your interests—in short, I read the document! and I am most thankful I did, for I at once decided that yours should be the first eyes to fall upon it. You can then act as you think best."

"But where," exclaimed Mrs. Travers, who had turned somewhat pale—-" where did you find it?"

- "You remember the large, old-fashioned bureau that stood in Mr. Travers's private room?—but no, you were there but once."
- "I have heard you and Mr. Wall speak of it," she replied.

"We had examined it carefully, for Mr. Travers used to keep his private papers, bonds, securities—matters unconnected with the business of the house—there. The day before yesterday I had noticed, in a list of drawings published in the Times, some numbers of Turkish coupons which I felt sure were held by our excellent principal, and late in the afternoon, when I had breathing time, I determined to look for the numbers which I had While so engaged, Poole came noted down. to me with one of the large ledgers which I usually lock away in the safe myself, as he had requested permission to leave early. I took it from him; but, as he closed the door, I remembered a commission I wished him to execute next morning, and, turning abruptly to catch him, the heavy ledger fell from my hand, striking the inlaid border that surrounds the writing-table part of the bureau. It is one of those enclosed by a simicircular revolving cover, which shuts all in. The corner of the cover must have come with much force upon a

spring, for I heard a slight click, a secret drawer on the right, outside the bureau, flew open, and in it I found this,"—laying his hand upon a thick folded paper which he had taken from its cover while he spoke.

"And it is——?" exclaimed Mrs. Travers breathlessly.

"The missing will," added Ford. "And now, my dear friend," he continued, with a tinge of unusual familiarity, "I must beg you to nerve yourself, for you will find this document to be singularly unjust. I may say basely unjust!" He paused nervously, biting his under lip, and, as he met the young widow's full, searching, almost stern gaze, he averted his eyes. When he looked at her again, she was holding out her hand for the document.

"I dare say you exaggerate its injustice, Mr. Ford," she said. "Even if the bulk of the property is left to Sir Hugh, I shall not complain. He is the natural heir. I have no right to more than a fair dower."

"Read it," returned Ford emphatically; "read it, and"—sinking his voice, and drawing his chair a little nearer to her—"remember, whatever course you may adopt, whatever decision you may make, I am utterly at your service." He stopped abruptly.

Mrs. Travers looked at him as if puzzled, and then unfolded the crackling paper, her eyes intently darting upon the stiff, legal writing with which it was covered. "Ah!" she exclaimed after a few moments, which were very long to Ford, "I seem lost in a maze of words, and cannot gather the sense."

"Allow me to read to you," he said, moving to her side. "You can follow, and I will explain. "You observe the date—March the 10th. Does that bring anything to your recollection?"

"No, nothing," returned Mrs. Travers quickly; "pray read on."

Ford plunged into the wilderness of words, skimming the technicalities quickly, yet with a slight tremor and catch in his voice, and bringing out the important morsels, dotted like islets in an Ægean of verbiage, with slackened speed and clear emphasis. Mrs. Travers listened in steady, unbroken silence to the very end; the hand with which she held one side of the sheet firm and still, while Ford's shook perceptibly. Cleared of circumlocution, the will, after some small bequests to old employés, all more or less different from similar dispositions in the first will, proceeded to express a wish that the house of Travers

should not be broken up, but kept in working order, either by the inheritor or a firm of partners; this was not distinctly directed, but left to the discretion of the executors. The testator then remarked, that, having provided for all just claims upon him by gifts and otherwise during his lifetime, he desired that all his property, real and personal, should go to his nearest of kin, Sir Hugh Galbraith. This bequest was untrammelled by any condition or reservation whatever.

When Ford ceased reading, Mrs. Travers turned quickly to the signatures, and read them aloud in a wondering tone. Ford rose, and stood at a little distance, silent, but watching her intently. Again Mrs. Travers turned to the beginning, as though she would read it once more; then, letting it fall, she looked up full at Ford, and, pushing back her hair from her brow, exclaimed. "I cannot understand it! I am never mentioned! 'He has provided for all just claims during his lifetime.' What does it mean? Oh, Mr. Ford, this must be a forgery! You cannot believe it genuine?"

"I would fain believe it false," he began in an unsteady voice, which he brought more under command as he proceeded. "I dreaded its effect upon you when I found what it was, and at once decided that you, and you alone, should first peruse it before any living soul knew of its existence."

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Mrs. Travers impatiently; "you are always very good; but do you mean to say that you believe Mr. Travers—my husband—would execute a will in which I am not even named; in which I am totally unprovided for—unthought of, unless the sentence about having provided for all claims by gifts during his lifetime glances at me?"

"And I suppose he made no deed of gift or settlement upon you?"

"No, certainly not. I remember being so vexed before we were married, by old Mr. Lee asking for some such thing. Mr. Travers was rather offended, and said I might trust him; and I did completely—justly—for" (with suppressed vehemence) "I will never believe this thing is real. No, not if one rose from the dead to tell me so! Do you believe in it, Mr. Ford?"

Ford made an attempt to speak before he could command his voice.

"I fear, my dear Mrs. Travers, it will be difficult to disprove it. I am most reluctantly

obliged to place the reality of the question before you. First, we have the fact that Poole, shortly before Mr. Travers's death, admitted voluntarily that he and old Gregory had, early in the previous spring, witnessed a will which Poole believes Gregory (who was one time a lawyer's clerk) had drawn up under Mr. Travers's own direction. Then we have your own belief that a will subsequent to that existed. Indeed, you thought your own strong wish that justice should be done to Sir Hugh suggested a change in Mr. Travers's testamentary dispositions. searched for the will in vain, our idea being that, as for some reason Mr. Travers chose to keep his intentions a secret from Messrs. Wall and Wreford, the bureau in his private room was the most likely place to find his There, accordingly, I, by a curious accident, do find it. The witnesses are the same as previously mentioned; the date also tallies with what we were led to expect; and, should you unfortunately not be able to arrange a compromise with Sir Hugh Galbraith, and if my evidence was called for, as it no doubt would be. I should be compelled to admit that, shortly before the date of that will, there was a disagreement of a somewhat painful nature on the subject of money between you and your late husband." He looked very intently at Mrs. Travers while he spoke.

"Of course you would have to speak the truth," she returned sharply. "But you surely do not mean to say that the trifling altercation you unfortunately overheard could have influenced Mr. Travers in so serious a matter as his will."

"It is impossible to say," said Ford. "No one knows better than yourself that your late good husband was not altogether free from crotchets more or less unreasonable."

Mrs. Travers made no immediate answer, but seemed looking through the document with some care.

"The names appear all written in a different hand from the rest," she said at last. "It is strange! It is incomprehensible!"

"It is cruel and deplorable," added Ford; "and," dropping his voice, "not the least painful result is, that Sir Hugh Galbraith, that haughty, overbearing fellow, will find a triumph prepared for him as soon as he arrives."

"Ah! then you believe this horrible, cruel,

unjust will is genuine. You cannot, Mr. Ford, surely you cannot!"

"My dear lady—my dear Mrs. Travers, it cuts me to the heart to be obliged to confess that you will find it hard, nay, impossible, to set it aside." She rose from her seat and walked towards the window as he spoke; he paused a moment, looking anxiously after her, and then resumed—"Still, I would beg you not to be too much cast down. Hugh cannot be devoid of all humanity; you observe Mr. Gervais, the executor to the first will, is joint executor with Sir Hugh himself. He is, I imagine, friendly to you; if he represents your case judiciously, I am sure the fortunate heir will not refuse you, his cousin and benefactor's widow, the means of subsistence, especially as you had made him a handsome offer of your own free will when you believed he had no claim. I think we may hope that Sir Hugh will make you some small---"

Mrs. Travers had turned, and come slowly back from the window while Ford spoke, and now broke in upon his speculations in a low, concentrated voice, while her eyes flashed.

"What are you speaking about, Mr. Ford? Do you think the will of any man could lower me into a dependent upon Sir Hugh's charity? Do you not see that he will immediately declare, and believe, that I knew of this—this—vile forgery, and so tried to buy him off and quiet my own conscience? Do you not see what an abyss of mortification and misrepresentation has opened at my feet?—and if—if this thing cannot be proved false, I must plunge in; there is no way of escape!" She grasped the back of a chair as she spoke, and Ford could see from the tight clutch of the white hands how strongly her spirit was moved.

"I do indeed see how horrible it is; how much more horrible it will be!" returned Ford, the colour rising in his cheek, and a light beginning to sparkle in his eyes. "My heart bleeds for you; and yet I must draw your attention to another point, of which I feel sure Sir Hugh and others will make the most and the worst."

"What more?" asked Mrs. Travers, as if her thoughts were far away.

"There is another name omitted from this will that was honourably mentioned in the former one—my own. You did not perhaps remember that I was left five hundred pounds?"

- "Yes, yes; I remember."
- "Then," resumed Ford, "it is highly probable that the total silence of this document respecting us both, coupled, in the mind of a worldly and not very high-toned man, with my pure devotion to your service; our previous——"

"I cannot imagine how any person could see the least connection between them," said Mrs. Travers. "But, be that as it may, I feel the ground giving way beneath my feet. I know this wretched will is forged, untrue; and yet, where can I turn for proof? How can I save myself from the humiliation of yielding, rescue or no rescue, to my insolent enemy?"

The last word was uttered with intense verve from between her clenched teeth by the fair, soft-looking widow.

"Can we find no way of escape?" asked Ford, in a low tone, looking intently at Mrs. Travers. She did not reply, and he resumed: "You would do much, anything to avoid submission to Sir Hugh."

"Yes, anything," she replied slowly.

"Then, Mrs. Travers," exclaimed Ford, his breath coming short and quick, "as you believe this will not to be genuine, suppress it!

Not a soul knows of it save you and myself; you think it forged; you will, therefore, do no moral wrong. Need I assure you how completely you may trust me; how I would guard you from discovery even more watchfully than you would guard yourself!" he ceased abruptly with a gasp, as if for breath.

Mrs. Travers turned, and looked at him full and steadily for a moment. "No!" she said, "that would indeed be to humiliate myself in my own eyes, and put myself under my adversary's feet. No, no; your sympathy for me, your friendly indignation, blinds you for the moment; we will blot out the sugges-I see you more than half believe this will is genuine, and you are the more indignant. I do not believe it. Nothing will ever make me believe it-cruel, base, my husband never could have been; meantime, I must show it to Mr. Wall, and get Poole to verify his signature. How unfortunate that poor Gregory is dead! He, no doubt, was acquainted with the contents."

Mr. Ford changed colour as she spoke, and passed his handkerchief across his brow, pressing it for a moment against his eyes. "Your decision," he said at last, in an altered tone, "does more credit to your conscience than to

your worldly wisdom. Yet, if the advice of one so culpably anxious for your welfare as I am may still be offered, I should say, Do not give this document too hastily into Mr. Wall's hands. Pause; think of all you resign—wealth, ease, freedom! think of the reverse which you will unavoidably incur—poverty, obscurity, hard work, possibly a faint suspicion that your late husband had some good cause for so complete, so extraordinary a change in the disposition of his property."

"I see it all, Mr. Ford, painfully clear; yet I must not do this thing." She spoke sadly, but composedly.

"Then," exclaimed Ford, with some agitation, "I have placed myself in your power to . no avail—my character is in your hands!"

"What can you think of me," cried Mrs. Travers, with much warmth, "if you do not believe that I would be as true to you as you to me? I am certain you would never do for yourself what in a moment of mistaken feeling you suggested to me. Let us forget it. To-morrow you will think differently; and, as to me, the proposition shall never cross my mind again." She looked kindly and frankly at him, but he did not meet her eye. "But," she resumed, "if I grieve at the prospect of

losing my all, I do not forget that you lose the legacy you so well deserved. Nothing makes me doubt the authenticity of this," pointing to the parchment, "more than the omission of your name."

"The whims of testators are positively unaccountable," said Ford sullenly.

"But then," urged Mrs. Travers, "there was no shadow of reason for showing disapprobation of you. Mr. Travers confided in you—liked you to the last. Yours was the last name he mentioned. Ah!"—suddenly she stopped, as, with a flash of memory's light, the dying man's words came back to her. "Still," she resumed, speaking to herself, "my faith is not shaken."

"Some expression of poor Mr. Travers no doubt recurs to you?" said Ford anxiously while he watched her keenly.

"Yes," she returned, with her accustomed candour. "Scarcely an hour before his death he said, 'You will think I have been unjust.' Then, after a while, he added, 'It is too late! words which I always thought pointed to a second will, but not one like this."

"Perhaps not; still they would apply. As to myself, who can tell that some instinctive feeling on the part of Mr. Travers may not have biassed him against me? He may have recognised the deep admiration I once—nay, ever have felt since those happy days when first I knew you! the ardent sympathy! the devotion——"

"Stop!" said Mrs. Travers gravely, coldly, and raising her hand with an imperious gesture which arrested the movement he made towards her. "These are not words for me to hear; but I am willing to forget them also, provided they are never repeated. I say so with no disrespect to you."

They stood for a moment face to face, and Ford's eyes fell under Mrs. Travers's composed gaze: a nervous, sinister smile flickered on his lip. He controlled himself with a visible effort, and, bowing low—

"You teach me my place," he said,—"a lesson I shall not soon forget. Once there was little difference in our positions—there may be less once more! But I have accomplished my errand, and received my reward; so I wish you good morning."

"I do not wish you to leave me in anger," said the young widow gravely. "Be just, be rational, and let us forget the whole of this morning's conversation."

"Forget—forget!" repeated Ford bitterly.

"It is easily said. I shall so far remember as not to intrude again. Good morning."

He turned away abruptly, and the next moment Mrs. Travers heard the front door open and shut violently. She looked after him with a sigh, and a troubled expression came into her face.

"There goes another enemy," she murmured; then, taking up the fatal paper, she slowly and carefully folded it up, laid it in a drawer, which she locked, and, sitting down to her writing-table, quickly penned the following:—

"DEAR SIR,—I shall call to-morrow between eleven and twelve. Endeavour to meet me: I have something very important to communicate."

This was addressed to W. Wall, Esq., 107, B—— Street, and she had it instantly despatched by a special messenger.

"Where is Miss Lee?" asked Mrs. Travers, when the serious Edwards returned to say her orders had been obeyed.

"Miss Lee is gone out, ma'am. One of the young ladies next door called, and Miss Lee left word she was going out for a walk, and did not like to disturb you, as you were engaged. Luncheon is quite ready, ma'am."

"Very well," returned his mistress mechanically; "but, Edwards, I cannot eat luncheon! I shall ask for something by-and-by. Go—go to your own dinner."

The man left the room, and Mrs. Travers remained gazing out upon the garden, where a flush of green and many opening blossoms told that Spring's first breath had touched the earth. Vaguely she looked out, and listened to the dim whisperings of her formless thought. She saw Cullingford and her cottage home quite distinctly across that mignonette border. She felt again fluttered pleasure which Mr. Travers's grave notice and conversation created. She saw Ford, always carefully dressed, open the garden gate, with his black bag in his hand, and stop to assist her in budding roses. She recalled the odd, mixed feelings with which she always regarded him. A sort of compassion-a dread of hurting him-a tinge of ridicule—a sensation of unsafety. And then her husband; so generous, so high-minded, yet so narrow and jealous! A hundred instances of his thoughtful affection returned to her memory. He leave her unprovided for, dependent on her enemy? Never could she believe it. Yet the effect would be the same as if that horrible will was authentic.

A certainty of defeat—of a long, weary struggle—pressed upon her. The pleasant visions of travel, of study, of the variety and repose which easy circumstances can realise, melted utterly away; and the only clear idea standing up out of this misty reverie was, that at least she had none to provide for save herself.

It was rather a relief to receive a message from Fanny to the effect that Mrs. Danby had some children to tea, and she would be so glad if Miss Lee could stay to assist in amusing them.

When Fanny returned, Mrs. Travers had gone to bed with a slight headache.



CHAPTER VIII.

ATE TRAVERS cut short all her lively friend's questions and conjectures when they met the next morning by exclaiming, "There,

Fanny dear! ask me nothing, and say as little as possible. I am going up to town immediately. When I return I will tell you everything, and you shall ask fifty questions, if you like!"

"I am sure something frightful has happened," cried Fanny, the tears springing to her bright brown eyes. "You look as pale as a ghost, and as stern as if you were going to the block. I wish you would tell me just the least little bit. But, no, I will not tease

you. I will wait till you choose. And, Kate," after a few moments' silence, "will you order dinner before you go? for I fancy Tom Reed will be here to-day; he neither came nor wrote yesterday."

"Oh, Fanny, I cannot. Besides, there is no time. You must be housekeeper for to-day; order everything nice. And now I must go, or I shall be late for Mr. Wall."

"Mr. Wall!" echoed Fanny. "It must be something terrible."

"Good-bye, dear Fan!" cried Mrs. Travers; "do not make yourself miserable. I have a sort of faith in my own fortune. I think I shall conquer in the end. Good-bye." And she ran away to put on her bonnet and gloves, summoning Edwards to walk after her to the station, as a tribute to the aristocratic prejudices of Hampton Court.

"How long shall I have a lacquey to follow me?" she thought, as the well-bred Edwards handed her her waterproof cloak and closed the carriage door, touching his hat. "And how long shall I be able to pay first-class fares?" For, in spite of her brave words to Fanny Lee, the young widow's heart sank within her. It was impossible to doubt that this new will was a very serious misfortune, even if, as she hoped, Mr. Wall's knowledge and experience enabled him to find some weak point into which he might insert the wedge of resistance. A long course of litigation! She shrank from the idea. Yet it was the best result she dared to hope for; and most resolutely she determined to fight it out, were it to cost her fortune and embitter her life, if—oh, potent monosyllable!—if there was a reasonable objection on which to ground resistance. But Kate Travers was too clear-headed to hope, save that Mr. Wall might perceive what her ignorance overlooked.

very bad business, I'm afraid!" was the wise man's dictum after more than an hour of anxious discussion and re-reading of Mr. Ford's unlucky "trove." "I cannot understand it. Why my poor friend should suddenly withdraw the confidence he had always reposed in this firm, and in myself particularly, I cannot conceive, except—and this is one of

the worst features in the case for you—that he was well aware I should never have assisted to draw up anything so unjust towards you. I was vexed, I acknowledge, that he should leave the man he once looked upon as his heir

"It is a bad business, Mrs. Travers, a

totally unprovided for; and so, I now believe, were you. But Sir Hugh Galbraith brought this upon himself. I could never have agreed to such an unjust will—never! Why, it lays you open to—to——" The lawyer, who was unusually moved, pulled himself up abruptly, and altered his phrase—"to refund all the moneys expended since the death of your late husband—all!" with emphasis. He paused, and met his client's eyes fixed earnestly upon him. A slight smile curved her lip.

"Lays me open to the most injurious suspicions, you were going to say," she rejoined quietly.

"I admit nothing of the kind. The realities of the case are quite enough, without adding imaginary hardships."

"But, Mr. Wall, you do not seem to take in my idea that this will is not genuine?"

"What are your reasons for that opinion?" asked the lawyer, severely, leaning back in his chair and thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets.

"My reasons!" repeated poor Kate, feeling how unreasonable they would appear to the legal mind. "Alas! they are scarce worthy the name, though very convincing to me. First, nothing could persuade me that Mr. Travers would make a will and never mention my name; then, his employing some stranger to draw it—his keeping it a secret—the different handwriting in parts—the change in all his former dispositions—his——"

"My dear lady," interrupted Mr. Wall, removing his hands from his pockets, and running his finger along the lines of the fatal paper which lay open on his desk, "the law ignores innate convictions. I observe the various names are filled in in a different hand: that is nothing, a very ordinary occurrence when there is a wish for secrecy. Now let me ask you, Whose interest would it be to forge this will? No one's save Sir Hugh Galbraith's; and I do not think, even in your present very naturally excited frame of mind, you could for a moment suspect a gentleman of unblemished honour, a soldier, to whom no amount of fortune could atone for the slightest taint---"

"I have not suspected him," returned Mrs. Travers, in a low, concentrated voice, "though he did not hesitate to write his suspicions that I had suppressed a will favourable to himself."

"That was quite a different matter," said Mr. Wall, disposed, as men usually are, to pooh-pooh a woman's claim to stand on the same platform as themselves in a question of honour. "It was very wrong, of course, but he was in a passion, and, you must remember, he knew nothing of you."

"Nor I anything to Sir Hugh's advantage. But I am not in a passion, nor do I suspect him. Mr. Ford——"

"My dear Mrs. Travers," interrupted the lawyer, "your doubts surely cannot wander in that direction! The poor man loses his five hundred pounds, and probably will lose his employment into the bargain."

"You are too quick, Mr. Wall. I was not going to say"—with a slight emphasis—"that I doubted Mr. Ford."

"Well, excuse me. Now I must ask you one or two questions, which I entreat you to answer truthfully—I mean faithfully. More mischief is done and causes lost, through the impossibility of getting litigants to tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, to their advisers than from anything else."

"I have always tried to be faithful and true," said Mrs. Travers, sadly, tears welling up in her large dark-blue eyes, as she looked steadfastly into those of her companion. "Ask what you will—I have nothing to conceal."

"I believe you—I believe you!" returned Wall, quickly and earnestly. "Look back as clearly as you can, and, if possible, recall any quarrel, any little difference of opinion which may have arisen between you and your excellent husband;—every trifle you can remember may prove important—differences will arise even between the most attached; and I am sorry to say the crotchets of testators are perfectly incredible, as well as the indolence which so often holds men back from undoing the wrongs into which temper, or jealousy, or heaven knows what, has hurried them."

"Latterly, no doubt from failing health, Mr. Travers was rather difficult," she replied; "but the only serious difference that ever arose between us was when, after the death of Miss Lee's grandfather, I sent her a small present of money. My allowance was very liberal, and I did not require Mr. Travers's help; so I sent it without letting him know. Her letter acknowledging the money fell into his hands, and I was astonished at the anger it caused. He said much that I have forgotten and he did not really mean, but he did not get over the irritation for some time."

"Did you do your best to soothe him

and make the amende?" interrupted the lawyer.

"I did my best. I told him I would never again repeat the offence, as it caused him annoyance; but I could not agree with him in thinking that I was wrong in doing what I had done; and I am of the same opinion still."

"Just so," returned Mr. Wall, in a cynical tone. "You stuck to your own opinion, cost what it might—a very womanish proceeding, excuse me."

"Yes, I excuse you," replied Mrs. Travers, colouring slightly; "only if you insist on women misrepresenting their opinions, do not quarrel with them for occasional departure from truth, which may not suit you quite so well."

"Anyhow," returned the lawyer, turning aside from this thrust, "your steadfastness has probably cost you a fortune! When did the altercation happen?"

"Some time in February last year—about the end, I think."

"And this is dated the 10th of March! I think that is strong presumptive evidence of the mischief you did yourself. No doubt Mr. Travers argued that, when a free woman, you

would squander all his hard earnings on your own friends; and men contract a wonderful affection for money they have scraped together! Unjust as it is, I have known the disposition of large properties totally changed for a slighter cause. I fear you have yourself to blame for this," striking the sheet with his finger, and unconsciously finding a sort of relief in what he could not resist feeling was a certain palliation of his late client's cruel will.

"And can you believe this?" cried Mrs. Travers passionately. She had kept herself well in hand hitherto, and now broke out only for an instant. "Can you be so unjust to your friend as to imagine that, in the full possession of his reason, he could have lived on, treating me with seeming confidence and affection, and yet be conscious of the treachery that would leave me penniless at his death! I knew him better, and nothing will ever make me believe this to be his genuine will!"

"It is not like him to have so acted," said the lawyer; "but," shrugging his shoulders with an air of superior wisdom, "if you knew as much of testamentary vagaries as I do, nothing would seem incredible. Nevertheless, I quite believe your late husband intended to change his will, and, as so many have done before him, put it off a little too long."

"He never signed this one," returned Mrs. Travers, sadly but emphatically; "and now what is to be done, Mr. Wall?"

"Ha—hum! It is really——" he began, hesitating, and looking again through the obnoxious document. "Gregory, one of the witnesses, is dead."

"Yes; he died last autumn. Mr. Ford says that Poole is under the impression the will was written out by poor old Gregory; but this is not his writing, so Mr. Ford says."

"Ah, that is nothing. I must see this man Poole, and try what I can make of him; but, my dear madam, I dare not flatter you with much hope. Everything tallies, you see, with the first report that another will was in existence. Poole mentioned the end of February or beginning of March as the period at which he was called upon to witness what he believed to be the will——"

"And then?" persisted Mrs. Travers.

"Well, then, if Poole is able to swear not only to his own signature, but that he and Gregory were present together on the day the will purports to be dated, and that he, Poole, saw the testator sign the will in the place where his name now appears thereon, in the presence of himself and Gregory, the other witness, and that they then and there in the presence of Mr. Travers and of each other affixed their names as witnesses thereto—why then I fear we cannot upset such proof, and we must inform Messrs. Payne and Layton, Sir Hugh's solicitors—a very respectable firm—and try to make the best terms we can for you. From all I have known of him, Sir Hugh Galbraith is not the man to——"

"What do you mean?" asked the widow, colouring very deeply, and opening her large eyes full upon him.

"That he must be induced to make you some allowance out of the estate; he certainly ought—..."

"Never mention such a thing!" cried Mrs. Travers, rising from her seat in her excitement. "I utterly forbid it! What! accept a compromise, and forego my right to dispute this base imposition—my chance of upsetting it! Never! I am young and healthy, and not uneducated; I will earn my bread somehow. But give up the possibilities of the future—never, never!"

The lawyer was a little startled by her suppressed vehemence.

- "Very natural you should say so just now, my dear Mrs. Travers; pray sit down again. We must reflect, above all things—reflect carefully, before taking a single step. Nothing need be done hurriedly; but I would advise your quietly collecting together everything poor Mr. Travers gave you in his lifetime; remember you are entitled to every thing he has ever given you—plate, pictures, furniture, jewels, books, &c.—and be careful in your expenditure. For how long have you that house at Hampton Court?"
- "Six months longer. Ah, Mr. Wall, I see there is no hope!"
 - "I do not exactly say so-"
- "I should like to see Poole myself," interrupted Mrs. Travers.
- "Hereafter if you will. I must see him alone first."
- "There is no more to be said now," returned the young widow, drawing down her veil. "I will go. Thank you for the friendly feeling you have shown. If there is the shadow of a chance you will fight, will you not?"
- "Not for a shadow, my dear lady—not for a shadow. I would rather secure a little substance for you."
- "I will have none of the substance you mean."

"Well, well! You must reflect calmly when you have cooled down. Nothing is a bad alternative."

"Good-bye," said Mrs. Travers, turning quickly away.

The lawyer followed her to the door.

"I will write the moment I have anything to communicate, depend upon that."

She bowed and was gone.

"An ugly business—a very ugly business," said the lawyer to himself, as he went back to his desk, and penned a note to Mr. Ford, requesting him to send up Poole immediately, and to call himself in the course of the afternoon. This he despatched by a special messenger.

* * * * *

Her present trial had in it elements of strength and bitterness totally dissimilar from Kate Travers's former experiences. There was nothing to touch her heart, for she exonerated her husband fully, utterly, from the cruelty and treachery of which Mr. Wall evidently suspected him. Impossible as it now seemed that she could ever prove it, or even find a plausible theory to account for her conviction, she was as certain that will was forged as though she had witnessed the operation. A vague idea that some one might have done

it to obtain a hold upon Sir Hugh floated through her brain, and was dismissed with a start, as it suggested another suspicion which seemed so preposterous that she strove to banish it immediately; yet it would not go, and haunted her for many a day and night, although she resolutely refrained from uttering it.

She was too natural and healthy a woman not to put a true value on the advantage of wealth—i.e. she was heartily sorry to lose it, but by no means overwhelmed with dismay at the prospect. The real sting lay in her adversary's victory—in the cause given to the malicious and the idly gossiping to shake their heads and cry, "Fie upon her! It is plain old Travers knew of something very disgraceful, as plain as if we saw it with our eyes." "After all"—she pondered, trying hard to keep fast hold of reason-"my possible errors and misfortunes will soon be forgotten! But what shall I do, and where shall I go? Not out of England—not too far from London. I will never lose the remotest chance of disproving that will."

The young widow had given up all hope for the present; four days had elapsed since her interview with the lawyer, and she had heard from him in the interim. Poole, he wrote, had made the necessary affidavit as to the due execution of the will by Mr. Travers in his and Gregory's presence, so that there was nothing for it but to submit, and the sooner the new will was communicated to the opposite party, the better chance of making good terms.

In the meantime, Mrs. Travers had gone through some trying scenes with poor Fanny The latter was Lee and the faithful Mills. cruelly disappointed, and strongly inclined to quarrel with everyone, including her muchenduring mistress. But Fanny's grief and terror at the idea that she might possibly be separated from her tender protectress touched her to the heart. "You will not send me I will do anything - be the away, dear. servant, and sweep, and dust, and cook! can do a ch—chop nicely!" sobbed Fanny. "I know I am a selfish thing, and very little use, but I'll break my heart and die if I leave you and go among strangers again!"

"Dear child! you shall not go if I can possibly help it," replied Mrs. Travers soothingly.

Mrs. Mills, with much significant headshaking and screwing up of the mouth, hinted her opinion "that, if her advice had been taken, things might have been different. It was true she hadn't much edication, but she could see how things was going clearer than most," &c., &c.

Tom Reed, too, the widow's prime counsellor, had run down twice to see them, and even he was overwhelmed. At first he could hardly credit the misfortune, but after he had seen Mr. Wall, and perused the unlucky discovery, he too, counselled compromise, and had gone away the evening before with carte blanche to agree to any suggestion of Mr. Wall's, except to ask for an allowance from the widow's triumphant foe.

Meditating on these unpleasant topics, Mrs. Travers strolled into the Palace gardens, at the hour when luncheon generally left them very much deserted. She wanted the freedom of loneliness. She wanted the fresh air, and to enjoy the beauty of the place, feeling that beauty might be a rare ingredient in her future every-day life.

She wanted, too, to re-read one or two advertisements in the *Times* which had caught her eye, and suggested plans; so she took that famous broad-sheet with her, and, seating herself on a bench that encircled a large yew tree, remained for some time in a sort of un-

conscious reverie — the nearest approach to stillness the waking brain can know. delicate perfume of the early flowers, the first flush of tender green upon the trees, the joyous spring note of the birds, the delicious odour of the freshly-clipped grass, the highbred beauty of the stately garden, filled her with a sad pleasure. To all this, and such as this, she must soon be a stranger, banished from the pleasant and lovely places of life by a caprice of circumstance! She knew how well suited to her taste, her nature, nay, even her outward presence, was all that is noble and beautiful, and she never seemed to have fallen into her right place. She never grew to be at home with the richly-dressed and fairly well-bred wives and daughters of Mr. Travers's City friends, or rather acquaintances—there was a lack of subjects in common between them. They dimly looked down upon her as a person of no connections, and she, too careless in her innate strength to recognise the wherefore, felt there was an indefinable barrier between them—an invisible fence, harder to clear than a stone wall. "The upper ten have certainly never taken kindly to me, if my Hereford Square acquaintance can be so classed. I suppose Sir Hugh would scarcely look on them as equals."

While she thus conjectured idly, steps approached, and the scent of an excellent cigar reached her. Voices — men's voices — came nearer, and two gentlemen, one in undress uniform, sat down on the opposite side of the tree.

"It is a deucedly lucky turn for you, but hard lines for the other. I wonder what vexed old Travers, and induced him to cut her off?" said one of the voices; and Kate could not resist listening eagerly for a few moments.

"Heaven knows," replied the other - a harsh, deep-toned voice, somewhat monotonous in its strength. "He must have been crazy altogether—first to forget all that was due to his age, his station, everything, and marry the low-bred daughter of a lodginghouse keeper; some bit of vulgar prettiness, whose highest ambition could not have soared beyond the owner of the general-shop in her native village! Faugh! Give me a fresh cigar, Upton! If in his old age poor Travers had such vagaries, could he not have been content to take her for a mistress? but to give her his name, and the fortune he once intended for me, and then to leave her penniless, dependent on my charity! It was insanity!"

"You had better not suggest the idea," said the other drily.

"It would be of no consequence," replied the second speaker. "It is no easy matter to upset a will. No lawyer would take up this female's case — but I shall not let the creature starve. By the way, she offered me a good slice of the property at the outset; depend upon it, she knew there was another will somewhere. Travers had found her out in some delinquency—conscience had made a coward of her."

"I don't know," began the other; but Mrs. Travers, colouring with shame both at what she had heard and for having stayed to hear it, sprang to her feet, and stole swiftly, softly away.

But for omnipotent appearances, she would have ran at full speed to hide herself in her own room, to try and silence the cruel words that rang over and over again in her ears. All her worst and bitterest anticipations were realised. The basest of her sex could not have been spoken of with deeper scorn.

No spark of manly consideration tempered this *gentle*man's judgment of a defeated, and, for all he knew, friendless woman. And this was a man of the class and profession usually credited with chivalrous traditions! Because he was reared in the purple of a higher caste he permitted himself to believe there was no honour, no principle, no heart, among the unfortunates in whose veins flowed the blood of those serfs over whom this proud man's forefathers had tyrannised, and who, in spite of every disadvantage, had developed themselves into the strength and power of the nation. How she hated and scorned him, and almost prayed for a chance of putting her foot upon his neck. It would be no common revenge that would satisfy her. No more aristocracy or gentility for her. No! She would enroll herself in the ranks of the simple, undistinguished workers. Though far from being a crying, hysterical woman, Kate Travers, already a little strained by the resolute suppression of her feelings, could not control a violent fit of weeping, so helpless and humiliated did she feel under a sense of undeserved All around was so dark too! gleam of hope in any quarter of the horizon! For more than the space of half an hour she felt beaten to the earth; and then her healthy hopeful nature began to assert itself. would rouse up and be doing something; and she had need to look round her quickly, for

she was well-nigh penniless. And no stress of circumstances would induce her to accept Sir Hugh Galbraith's "charity."

At this point of her reflections there was a tap at the door, and Fanny's voice asked, "Are you there, Kate?"

"Yes."

"We have been looking all over the gardens for you. I did not know you had come in. Tom Reed is downstairs and wants to see you."

"I will come directly."

But it took some time to bathe her eyes effectually, and she was vexed to see they were still red and swollen, when she felt ashamed to keep her visitor waiting any longer.



CHAPTER IX.

EAR MADAM,—I have had a long interview with Sir Hugh Galbraith's solicitor. He informs me he is authorised to offer you an

allowance during your lifetime from the estate of your late husband of three hundred pounds (£300) per annum, on condition that you agree to accept the will to which Sir Hugh administers as the true and final expression of the testator's intentions, and sign a declaration to that effect.

"I urged that the allowance was considerably disproportioned to the estate; and he very naturally replied that Sir Hugh was in no way bound to consider this, or to make any allowance whatever.

"Now, my dear madam, let me urge upon you the necessity of giving this offer due consideration. Both as your legal adviser and if you will permit it, as your friend, I strongly advise you to accept. I do not see the most remote prospect of being able to dispute this very unjust will, and you are, I am sure, too sensible a woman not to recognise the wisdom of the old proverb, 'Half a loaf,' &c. Payne, Sir Hugh's solicitors, are willing to renounce all claim for moneys disbursed since the death of Mr. Travers, as I have represented that you simply kept up the establishment as your late husband left it; and I must here warn you that rent, wages, &c., now due, should be paid by the executors out of the estate.

"Any further information you may require you can obtain from Mr. Reed, who is good enough to take charge of this letter, and with whom I would suggest your taking counsel; he seems truly interested in you, and is also a man of business.

"Hoping to see you in a few days,

"I am, dear Madam,

"Yours truly,

"F. WALL."

"Mrs. Travers, Hampton Court."

This letter was handed to the widow by Reed as soon as their first greetings had been exchanged. And she read it through steadily, without moving a muscle of her countenance, while Reed watched, with the keenest sympathy, the traces of tears and mental conflict upon her fair face.

"Well, Tom," she said, with a brave attempt to smile as she finished reading, "it is all over. There is nothing now to be done but to go forth into the wilderness."

"It is by far the most infer——" began Reed.

"Hush, dear old friend," interrupted Mrs. Travers; "do not rouse up the passion and bitterness I have scarcely succeeded in crushing down for the present."

"No, I will not," he returned persistently. "But Wall commissioned me to mention one or two matters which he omitted to write"—and Reed paused abruptly.

"Disagreeable things, I suppose, Tom," said Mrs. Travers with a sigh. "But you need not fear to 'put a name' to anything. I fancy my thoughts have been before you. The strongest feeling I have is an ardent desire to leave this place, where I have now no right to be."

"Exactly," cried Reed. "That was the first point I was to speak about. The sooner you move the better. And Galbraith's solicitors, I was to tell you, are authorised to pay a quarter's allowance, annuity, or whatever it is,"—he stumbled a little over this part of his speech—"in advance, provided you can vacate at once."

"Do they think I must be bribed to give up what Sir Hugh Galbraith looks upon as his property?" said Mrs. Travers. "I am quite ready to go; but you must understand me, Tom! I take no money from my foe."

"A very natural reluctance," began Tom soothingly, and launched into a sensible and persuasive speech—for this was the point specially confided to his tact and eloquence by Mr. Wall.

Mrs. Travers listened quietly, without the smallest interruption; and when Tom Reed, having exhausted his subject, paused for a reply, she said in a low, firm voice, "Do not waste any more words, Tom. On this matter my mind is unalterably made up. Had I children, I might decide differently. As I am, no necessity shall compel me to touch Sir Hugh's money."

"Poor Fanny!" escaped almost involuntarily from Reed's lips. "She will be homeless again."

"She shall not," returned Mrs. Travers, glancing with a kindly smile at her companion, while tears stood in her eyes. "I could not bear to part with that dear, faithful, thoughtless child—for she is a child in many ways. But, Tom, I have a dim sort of project of which I shall speak to you presently. And I am not quite without resources. I have some jewels, diamonds, and other things which Mr. Travers bought for me, and which are distinctly mine."

"What are they worth? A mere trifle; nothing to reckon upon," replied Reed, in a disparaging tone.

"They cost seven or eight hundred pounds, if not more."

"And they would not bring half that money when sold," he rejoined. "Even if they did, what is the interest of seven hundred pounds?
—not enough to buy you scented soap."

And again Tom urged the acceptance of Sir Hugh's bounty, and almost lost his temper at the widow's senseless obstinacy, as he termed it. Then she shed a few tears, which disarmed Tom; so they parted, Mrs. Travers's resolution still unmoved, and Reed refusing to consider her decision final.

"Tell Mr. Wall," were her parting words, "that the day after to-morrow he can hand over this house to Sir Hugh Galbraith, or the owner. I shall leave it before noon."

"But, my dear soul! you will never be able to pack up your traps, and decamp by the day after to-morrow?"

"I shall. Poor Mills, Fanny, and myself have been preparing ever since I saw Mr. Wall. I only require to find a lodging somewhere in town. I can do that to-morrow; and then, Tom, you will still be my counsellor and familiar friend, though I am unfortunate, and stupid, and blind to my own interests, and everything else that is wrong?"

"Look here, Mrs. Travers," cried Tom, grasping her hand energetically; "right or wrong, I'll stick to you through thick and thin !"

"I believe you," she returned, trying bravely not to cry. "You shall have a line from me with the new address some time to-morrow; and you must come and see us very soon."

"Won't I? And now—excuse the question—have you any cash?"

"Yes; enough for the present. Go, and

bid Fanny good-bye. I have too much to do to ask you to stay."

A few days later, Reed found Mrs. Travers and his cousin comparatively settled in a small street in that part of Camden Town which considers itself entitled to write Regent's Park on its addresses.

The change from the airy, stately, old-fashioned house to the narrow front-parlour struck him with a keen sense of pain; but he could not refrain from observing that Mrs. Travers looked brighter and Fanny less tearful than when he had seen them last.

It was evening when he reached their abode, and the little room was somewhat gloomy; but Mrs. Travers lit the gas at once, and then he beheld a table laid for tea, with the addition of cold meat and water-cresses. There were even tufts of primroses and violets on the mantel-shelf, and a general look of order and occupation inseparable from the presence of cultivated, thoughtful women.

"Oh, Tom, I am so glad to see you," cried Fanny, springing to meet him.

"And so am I," said Mrs. Travers heartily; while Mills, who had been seated at table, rose

with a rueful countenance, curtsied, and made as though to leave the room.

"Do not stir, Mills. Tom, you will be pleased to have Mills at tea. We are all companions in misfortune," said Mrs. Travers.

"To be sure," cried Tom cheerfully. "Sit down, Mrs. Mills. You look pretty comfortable. Tea! I am dying for a cup. Come, Fanny; I will let you sit next me, if you promise to cut my bread-and-butter."

And the friends gathered round the table with wonderfully cheerful exteriors, at all events; and for a while the talk flowed as if nothing had happened.

"There is no use in moping," cried Tom at last. "What do you say to a box at the Haymarket to-morrow night? There is a capital piece on there, and I think I can get you a box."

"Take Fanny, by all means," replied Mrs. Travers; "as for me, I do not pretend I should not enjoy it, but it would be most unseemly."

"If you think so, I can say no more; but you will come, Fanny? and I tell you what, we will take Mrs. Mills. I dare say her 'young man' has not treated her to the

theatre all the time she was vegetating at Hampton Court."

"Ah, go 'long with you, Mr. Tom!" returned Mrs. Mills, slightly relaxing as Reed, raising his voice, addressed her. He was an immense favourite with the afflicted Mills, who remembered him in his school-boy days of tatterdemalionism.

"Yes, yes, Mills, you must come!" cried Fanny. "It will do you all the good in the world."

"Well now, Miss Fanny, I did think you would be the last to leave my poor dear lady all alone in her trouble, to fret and break her heart; but you go and amuse yourself, I'll stay and keep her company."

"But, Mills, you are so miserable yourself you won't do her one bit of good," returned Fanny at the top of her voice. Then suddenly lowering it, and in deep penitence, "There! what a stupid I am! I have done it," watching Mills, whose face assumed an awful expression.

"You needn't tell me so, Miss Fanny. I know well enough I am no good now; but you needn't tell me so."

"I do declare, Mills, I never meant anything of the kind."

"No, no," said Tom, cutting a tempting thin slice of bread and butter; "Miss Fanny only meant to say you and Mrs. Travers would do each other no good if you were left together. A little more bread and butter, Mrs. Mills?"

"I am much obliged to you, I have had enough. No good, indeed!" and Mills, refusing everything, comfort included, made her exit, stating she had plenty to do.

"And now, Tom," said Mrs. Travers, when the table was cleared, "let us have a committee of ways and means; bring over my writing-book and the ink, Fanny, while I get all my worldly goods for Tom's inspection."

"Oh, Tom!" cried Fanny, as Mrs. Travers left the room; "do not let her send me away! I cannot tell you how miserable I am sometimes when the possibility of such a thing comes across me. I shiver and turn cold, and I know I look blue. I suppose I am very selfish and good-for-nothing to feel so; I ought to be brave and go away and earn my own bread, but I can't, dear Tom, I can't indeed. It was so horrible before; I could do anything with her—but alone——"

She broke down abruptly. Poor Reed's heart was at his lips, he caught her hand in both his own, his keen black eyes softening

with the tenderest sympathy. "Dearest, sweetest cousin!" he exclaimed, in such an unusual tone that Fanny looked up startled, "you must not fret yourself. I think Mrs. Travers will manage to keep you with her still; and if she cannot—why, you had better come and manage my housekeeping." And he kissed the hand he held lovingly.

"Oh! Tom," returned Fanny, with a vivid blush as a consciousness of his meaning dawned upon her; "that is nonsense."

"I am afraid it is, just at present," said Tom, with a sigh and a smile, as he slowly relinquished her hand. "But if ever!"—interrupting himself, "Fanny! I must never indulge myself in such talk till it ceases to be nonsense. Eh, Fanny, darling?"

"Nothing short of the profoundest sense should ever be addressed to such a sage as I am," returned Fanny, arranging the writing materials a little nervously; "so no more nonsense an you love me, Tom."

"As I love you, no!" said Reed with unwonted seriousness.

Mrs. Travers re-entered at that moment, perhaps fortunately for Tom Reed's self-control. "I have restored Mills' equanimity," she said, smiling, "which kept me a little.

Here, here is all I possess!" and she placed sundry morocco-covered cases on the table.

- "Ah! now for an examination," cried Tom; and the three friends drew in their chairs. "What have we here?" he continued, assuming a solemn and magisterial air. "Three diamond stars! By Jove! they are sparklers!"
- "How lovely, Kate. Why did you never show them to me before? Is it not cruel to have to sell them?" said Fanny.
- "Here are the earrings to match," said Mrs. Travers. "Poor Mr. Travers bought them after the first great dinner party we went to together, when he observed I was the only lady present without jewels; the stars cost two hundred and fifty guineas, and the earrings one hundred."
- "Put that down, Fanny; mind you make nice figures. What next, madam?"
- "These bracelets, opal and diamond, and emeralds. Mr. Travers gave seventy pounds for one, but I do not know how much for the other."
- "The stones look very fine; but I am no judge," said Reed. And so they went through the whole array—bracelets, rings and lockets, jewelled hair-pins and earrings; the prices of

but few were known to Mrs. Travers, and Reed tried to guess at their probable cost, always telling Fanny to put down considerably less. Yet on examining the list, he found a sum total of six hundred and thirty-five pounds.

"A decent little capital, if you could but realize it," cried Tom. "We must not hope for that, I fear. You may get something near the value of the stones if we can find an honest jeweller. The diamonds ought to sell well if we could find a private purchaser. My own experience in such matters is extremely limited—limited, in short, to small transactions in days bygone, with a relative whose natural and acquired sharpness, quite unsoftened by any kinsmanly consideration, was more than a match for my inexperience.' Mrs. Travers laughed, and Fanny opened her eyes. "We must do the best we can," resumed Tom. "I shall take advice. Perhaps," insinuatingly, "when you find how little these pretty things will produce, you will give more favourable consideration to the offer——"

"If they only bring me twenty-five pounds, or nothing, my determination will be still the same; do not mention that man or his offer," said Mrs. Travers in a low voice.

- "Do you know I have seen him!" exclaimed Fanny, with mingled horror and triumph.
- "You! impossible!" cried Mrs. Travers and Tom together.
- "Yes, I did. It was that day, just before we left, when I went to look for you, Kate, in the palace gardens, I saw Colonel Upton walking with a great, tall, ugly, red-looking man. I felt in some extraordinary way that it was—him," continued Fanny, suppressing the name. "And in the afternoon, when I was paying the bills, you know, Kate, I met that horrid Mrs. Danby, and she cried out, 'Has Sir Hugh Galbraith been to see you? for he is down here to-day with Colonel Upton."
- "How has the charming Mrs. Danby become horrid?" asked Reed, looking up from his figures, to change the conversation.
- "Oh, she was so prying and unfeeling, and——"
- "But," resumed the prime counsellor, turning to Mrs. Travers, who kept silence, "suppose you succeed in getting, say, half the value, or rather the cost of these pretty things. What is your scheme? for I see you have one."
- " Read that," replied Mrs. Travers, opening

her pocket-book and taking out a slip of newspaper; "read it aloud."

Tom took it and read as follows:-

"To be disposed of, on moderate terms, in consequence of the owner's death, the goodwill and stock-in-hand of a first-class fancywork and stationrey business in a thriving town on the sea-coast, not far from London, much frequented by summer visitors, and surrounded by resident gentry. The lease of the house (old-fashioned and commodious), seven years unexpired, to be included in the purchase. Address C. P., Messrs. Hook and Crook, Size Lane, City."

"Why, what in Heaven's name has this to do with it?" cried Tom, when he finished, looking up with a bewildered air.

"Everything," returned Mrs. Traversquietly. "If, on inquiry, it turns out a promising speculation, and I can get money enough, I shall buy it and turn tradeswoman - you know I am partly 'to the manner born,' Tom."

"Keep a shop! you!" exclaimed Fanny, in open-mouthed amazement, and then became silent, too stunned to talk.

"Well, this is quite in keeping with your refusal to accept the tolerable means of existence to which you have an undoubted right. I never heard anything so preposterous," said Tom, with some heat. "What would poor old Travers say, if he could look out of his grave, to see his name over the door of a miserable shop!—and you always say you respect his wishes."

"His name was long enough on a doorpost; but it shall not be over any shop. Have patience, Tom; hear all my scheme," said Mrs. Travers, with much sweetness, and then went on rapidly, "I have thought of every-I must work to live—the question is thing. There are only two lines open to women, teaching, or business in a small way. I leave the miserable indefiniteness of 'companionship' out of the question. If I adopt teaching I become at once a homeless waif, and Fanny the same; while Mills will have to be provided for somehow. True, I might attempt a school, where they would be of use to me; but I cannot find that I have courage for such a hopeless struggle as working up a * school. Now, this 'business' will give me a home and evenings to myself. I have already written for particulars. If they are satisfactory I will risk it, Tom; but one thing I promise you, unless I can pay the whole purchase-money at once, I will give it up. I VOL. I. 12

will not begin with a burden of debt on my back. Fanny shall be my assistant, Mills our housekeeper, so the old home shall not be broken up; and trust me, I will put heart and soul, energy and pluck, into my new career."

"Career!" echoed Tom, "I never heard such insanity! you will lose your money, and your position into the bargain. Fancy you behind a counter, and Fanny matching wools! I can never consent to such degradation."

"Is that a suitable word from the subeditor of a 'high-class Liberal paper.' For
shame, Tom! do not be false to your principles. My career shall not be degrading;
but listen to me. I do not want any one save
yourself to know where I am. I want to lie
in wait for some evidence about this will. I
shall never rest until I know the truth,—
there is some unaccountable mystery about
it."

"Not much, I am afraid," said Tom, shaking his head.

"I always think that horrid Mr. Ford made it up to worry us all," exclaimed Fanny, at the last speaking with her tongue.

"I see I shall have to secure berths for both of you at Hanwell," said Tom resignedly. "Mrs. Travers wanting to keep a shop, and you, Fanny, accusing that poor fellow, Ford—who has lost his legacy, and will no doubt lose his situation, who has always been Mrs. Travers's most devoted servant—of forging a will directly opposed to his own interests!—really, you are a pair of very charming madwomen!"

"Do not be so ridiculous, Tom; I never could bear Mr. Ford."

"Ah, then, I dare say he has committed a couple of murders, and forged no end of things," said Tom, with an air of assumed conviction.

"Do not talk such nonsense, Fanny dear," added Mrs. Travers absently.

"Now, let us say no more about this wild project," said Tom, rising. "You will think differently when you have reflected a little more. It is getting late. I will make all the inquiries I can to-morrow as to the best course to be pursued with the jewels; and perhaps have something to suggest when I come for Fanny to go to the Haymarket; for we must not lose our expedition because we quarrel—eh, mesdames?"

"No, certainly not," replied Kate. "One word, Tom, before you go. Your word of honour, that you keep this project of mine a

secret from every one, especially Mr. Wall and Mr. Ford."

"Trust me, I would not mention your temporary insanity to any one. By the way, Ford was with me to-day—and deucedly cutup he looks—to ask your address. I said I did not know if I was at liberty to give it; but that I would forward any note. He told me he heard old Mr. Gervais had refused to act as executor."

"Then everything is absolutely in Sir Hugh's hands," exclaimed Mrs. Travers. "Time, and time only, can unravel this web! Good-night, Tom; bear with me yet."

"Good-night, Fanny," squeezing her hand; on which the mischievous little witch cried, "Oh, you hurt me; see the mark my ring has made!" whereat Mrs. Travers laughed goodhumouredly, and Tom, also laughing, disappeared.

"Tell me, Fanny," said Mrs. Travers thoughtfully, when they were left alone, "would it break your heart to keep a shop with me?"

"Oh, to tell the real truth, I do not like the idea of a shop at all. I always fancy the Honourable Mrs. Danby turning up to buy twopence-halfpenny worth of wool, and her polite, well-bred surprise at finding you and me there. But Kate, dear, rather than be parted from you, I would help you to keep a rag-and-bone shop!" cried Fanny heartily, falling on her neck and kissing her. "Only you must mind what Tom says. He knows everything! and, Kate—I did not like to mention it before him-but there is that beautiful pearl locket and the turquoise bracelet you gave me. You do not suppose I am going to keep them? There!" taking two cases from her pocket. "I got them out when I heard you say you were going to look over your things; and," continued Fanny, blushing, "I have five pounds left of what you are pleased to call my quarter's salary—there it I am ashamed to have so little, and I would not even have that, only it is so soon after quarter-day."

"I think, dear Fan, we may spare my little gifts—at least at present. But I will gratefully accept the money. Keep a sovereign, just to prevent your being penniless!"

"Oh, I am nothing of the kind. I have five shillings left. More, Kate—dearest Kate—than I had when you took me in!" Another hug.

"Well, go to bed, dear," returned the

young widow. "We can do no more at present. I believe, Fanny, there is a happy future before you; and for myself, somehow, I cannot fear, so long as I can work in my own way."

Fanny disappeared; but Kate Travers sat long alone, and in profound meditation.



CHAPTER X.

IME seemed very long to our dispossessed heroine and her dependents.

While Tom Reed sought, with all the energy and shrewdness for

which he was remarkable, to do the best for his friend. Of the three, Fanny seemed to bear the lingering days best. Mrs. Travers noticed that since her visit to the theatre under her cousin's escort, there had been a remarkable look of quiet happiness in her eyes, a little less of flightiness in her conversation, from which she drew her own conclusions, though she asked no injudicious questions.

Meantime the reply to her inquiries respecting the fancy-work business duly arrived, and seemed satisfactory and straightforward. The last possessor had maintained an invalid husband and a daughter besides herself upon the proceeds. The daughter was married and in easy circumstances, so was not disposed to carry on the undertaking. She therefore wished to sell it as soon as possible, and sink the money and some small savings in a life annuity for her father. The sum asked (four hundred pounds), though not large, was the difficulty, as Mrs. Travers found the prices offered for her jewels were far below what she had anticipated.

If she had any other scheme within the bounds of reason on foot, Reed said, she might take counsel with, and obtain assistance from, Mr. Wall, though he was deeply incensed by her refusal of Sir Hugh Galbraith's offer.

But one of Mrs. Travers's objects, indeed, her chief object, seemed a desire to vanish from the scene into obscurity, at least for the present. "And," she thought—for she was pondering these things as usual, while dressing one morning, a few days after the interview last described—"I must not forget Mrs. Bell, poor old Gregory's daughter. I daresay she knows nothing of the changes that have taken place. I must let her know that it is out of

my power to fulfil my promise of a further gift. What a disappointment it will be to her! I will call upon her to-day; and I will also see Mr. Wall, and ask him to intercede with Sir Hugh, and induce him to make her some small allowance or present. I dread seeing that severe lawyer, but I must, and this is a topic that will nerve me."

Mrs. Travers's expectations of a chilling reception were amply fulfilled. Mr. Wall was expressively silent on the subject which was uppermost in the thoughts of each, though he slightly relaxed the terrors of his countenance as the young widow, her violet-blue eyes suffused with tears, thanked him in her low, clear tones, for the friendly interest he had shown in her.

"I could have done much more for you had you acted with the same common sense you have hitherto shown," he replied gloomily. And Mrs. Travers remarked, with an inward smile, the subtle change in his tone. It was far from being careless or disrespectful; but it was perceptibly more familiar than in the days so short a time ago—yet so infinitely far back—when she was surrounded by the halo of that divinity which doth hedge the owner of real and personal property.

"And have you formed any plans? though perhaps you do not care to divulge them to a person whose advice was so unacceptable."

"I cannot fix anything until some jewels I have are disposed of. I have thought of going on the Continent. I know German and Germany tolerably; and it has been suggested that I should try and establish a school for English girls in one of the Rhine towns," returned Mrs. Travers hesitatingly.

"Ha! not a bad idea. And the jewels—may I ask their probable value?"

"Seven or eight hundred pounds. At least, they cost that sum. Do you think you could assist me to dispose of them?"

"I do not think I could. I don't think I could; but you might let me see them," added the worthy lawyer, melting more and more.

"I will. And now, Mr. Wall, I have a great favour to ask," began Mrs. Travers, and proceeded to unfold her benevolent plan of representing poor Mrs. Bell's case to Sir Hugh Galbraith.

But this proposition had a most unfortunate effect in rousing Mr. Wall's indignation at the idea of asking that consideration for another which she rejected for herself; and he absolutely refused. "The application, if it be made, should come through Mr. Ford," concluded the lawyer, in a chilling voice.

"But may he not be dismissed by this time?" asked Mrs. Travers.

"I should say certainly not. Ford is too essential to the winding up of the business, if it is to be wound up. I should not be surprised if Sir Hugh Galbraith bestows upon him the five hundred originally bequeathed. If he is wise, he will; and I daresay he will not reject it."

"Then I shall ask Mr. Ford's assistance," replied Mrs. Travers, with some spirit, and rising as she spoke. "I need not trespass any longer on your time. If we should not meet again, pray remember I shall always be grateful for your friendliness; and I consider your displeasure proves a high degree of friendliness," concluded the young widow, holding out her hand with a smile half sad, half playful.

The old lawyer, slightly thawing once more, began, "I shall always be happy to be of use to you." Then, checking himself, added, "But, excuse me, no one can be of use to a wilful woman."

"Good-bye," said Mrs. Travers, declining the combat; and she hastily left the room.

It surprised her to feel such a choking sensation in her throat when she found herself once more alone and in the street. Was her courage going to fail? That must not be. Yet it was rather appalling to look round and see everyone against her-Tom, Mr. Wall, Fanny, and last, far from least, Mills. she only be right and all these wrong? hard it is to have faith in one's own convictions, especially for those frank minds who can believe heartily, and are yet free from "Nevertheless, I will persevere. obstinacy. If I can muster money enough for this purchase, I will make it. What a grand triumph it would be to make a business pay! to prove myself the best judge of my own affairs, even if my other 'dim religious' hope be unful-Yet I risk and resign much." filled.

So thinking, she persevered in a hot, dusty walk, and a still hotter, dustier "ride" in an omnibus, in order to reach Mrs. Bell's abode.

It was past four o'clock, and she was delighted to see quite a stream of little girls, bag or satchel in hand, issuing from the door. The whole aspect of the house was changed, as was also that of Mrs. Bell and her daughter.

"I am sorry to be the bearer of what is bad news for us both, Mrs. Bell," she began, and at once plunged into the narrative of her changed fortunes; her listener's countenance fell as she proceeded.

"Dear me," she observed, when Mrs. Travers stopped, "I can hardly believe it. It is a shame, and you can do nothing? Surely the law can stop such a will as that?"

"I fear not, Mrs. Bell. Pray have you ever heard your father speak of having written out a will at Mr. Travers's dictation?"

"I have heard something about it, but I forget what. What was it now?" striving painfully to remember, while she mechanically plaited up the edge of a large black stuff apron which covered her dress. "It was something I heard my father say one evening, not long before my brother sailed last time, a year ago, about working after hours for Mr. Travers, and that he thought he ought to have a rise when Mr. Travers trusted him to do private business he did not give even to Mr. Ford. I think those were his words."

"Do you think your brother would know anything more?" asked Mrs. Travers eagerly.

"He might and he might not. You see, John has a great deal on his mind; but that is all I remember."

- "When do you expect Captain Gregory back?"
- "I do not exactly know. He was to have been home next month, but my sister-in-law had a letter last week, and he is taken up to carry rice somewhere in India, and he does not seem to know when he will be home."
- "You will let me know whenever he returns, will you not?" said Mrs. Travers impressively.

"You may depend upon me."

Mrs. Travers then proceeded to tell her downcast *protégé* of her intended application to Sir Hugh Galbraith, with what success she could not pretend to foresee, and after some kindly, friendly talk, left Mrs. Bell somewhat cheered, and giving her own address to Reed's care.

It was late, and she felt greatly wearied when she reached her lodgings; and although Mrs. Mills met her with many half-testy, half-sympathetic expressions of regret that she should go and just wear herself out, she was wonderfully disappointed to find that Fanny had gone away with Mr. Reed for a walk in the park.

But she was not left long alone; by the time tea was prepared the cousins returned,

and Mrs. Travers fancied there was the promise of something cheering in the expression of Tom Reed's countenance. He said nothing, however, till the tea-things were removed, and they were once more in committee.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I think I have found a chance for disposing of the diamonds at last, Mrs. Travers. A friend of our 'chief.' a young fellow from Lancashire, who is up in town spending his money and seeing life, wants to present a lady with some diamonds (I suppose his fiancée). I overheard him ask Penington (that is our editor) what a regular turn-out would be likely to cost? He said, 'Oh, eight hundred or a thousand pounds.' This seemed to stagger our young rustic, so I put in my oar. 'I could get you a first-rate set for four hundred, good as new, from one of the first houses in London' (yours were from H——, were they not?) He pricked up his ears at this, and, in short, I have agreed to show him the jewels, if you will trust them with me."

"What a good fellow you are, Tom," cried Mrs. Travers. "You never lose a chance."

"And be sure you make him pay four hundred guineas!" exclaimed Fanny.

"Oh, you greedy creature! No, Tom, I

shall be quite satisfied if I can get what they cost."

"Diamonds is 'riz' since those were bought," returned Reed solemnly. "The young man shall have them at a trifle below the present value—if he will buy them. You will please to remember there is an 'if' in the case."

"I am quite aware of it," said Mrs. Travers. "There, Fanny, is the key of my dressing-box: bring down the three red morocco cases." Then, as she left the room, she added, "How well Fan looks, and what a comfort she is to me! I do hope, Tom, you will not, as her next of kin, raise any serious objection to her joining me in business. I would not feel justified in deliberately opposing you."

"I do not think she would mind me if I did," returned Reed, smiling and shrugging his shoulders. "But I have no right to interfere—at present. Remember, this admission is without prejudice to any future interference I may feel entitled to."

"I understand," replied Mrs. Travers, smiling kindly upon him.

"For the present we must only think of you, and how best to help you," he resumed;

"and though your scheme at first seemed the maddest idea, I begin to think it might be managed if you had the least knowledge of business; but I am afraid you will come to grief."

"I think I shall manage it," said Kate Travers thoughtfully, "if I can only get a margin, after the purchase, to live upon for the first year, and make the business feed itself."

"And what margin would you require?"

"Well, the rent is low, and we have plenty of clothes: I dare say a hundred and thirty or forty pounds."

"A hundred and thirty pounds!" echoed Tom. "You will never do it."

Here Fanny returned with the diamonds. They were again examined and admired. The high preservation of the cases was pointed out as a most favourable circumstance. Then Tom Reed put them in his breast-pocket, buttoned up his coat, and swore melodramatically that whoever attempted to take them would first have to rifle his mangled corse.

"Talking of mangling, Tom," said Fanny,
"I saw that dreadful-looking man you spoke
to at Waterloo Station the day I came from
Yorkshire in the park to-day, sitting under

the trees near the canal; but I would not tell you, for fear you would speak."

"You saw him, then? So did I; but said nothing, lest you should do anything to attract his attention. Poor devil! he looks worse than ever. I wonder who he has got hold of—a well-dressed, respectable-looking fellow."

"Yes, he was," replied Fanny, "and I have an idea I know his face!"

"You are always fancying you remember people."

"I have a wonderful memory for faces," said that young person, shaking her head gravely.

"And now farewell, and peace be with you," said Tom, rising.

"One moment," exclaimed Mrs. Travers.
"I had almost forgotten. Have you given Mr. Ford my address?"

"No, I never thought of it."

"I will write to him myself, then. I must see him about that poor woman, Mrs. Bell, though I would much rather not. Remember, Tom, should you meet him, not a word of my plans."

"Sovereign! to hear is to obey."

Writing to ask a favour of Mr. Ford was an especially distasteful task to Kate. She felt it must lead to the unpleasantness of an interview, there was so much to be discussed between them. Moreover, she was anxious not to show anything like resentment for the trouble he was the innocent means of bringing upon her; and, with the effort to compose a suitable note, came a curious train of thought. Old feelings of distrust and undefinable, unreasonable aversion came back upon her; suspicions she could not drive away, and was ashamed to express, thronged her mind, thick, shapeless, like volumes of vapour, too vague to be combatted, too pervading to be resisted.

Yet, if she did not speak her thoughts, how was she ever to make an onward step in her progress towards unravelling the mystery of the will? "Ah, there is no use in thinking about it now. I must wait—I must wait," said Mrs. Travers, with a sigh, resuming her pen and hastily finishing her note, not at all to her satisfaction; but she could do no better, so she let it go.

It was speedily answered. Mr. Ford stated, in the best possible English, that he had been somewhat seriously indisposed, or he should

have made an attempt to see Mrs. Travers before; and, as it was impossible to discuss the matter mentioned in her note except in a personal interview, he would do himself the honour of calling on Mrs. Travers on the following Thursday evening.

Mrs. Travers laid down the note with a sigh, and opened one from Reed, which informed her that "the Lancashire lad" was favourably disposed towards the diamonds, but wished to look about him before purchasing them.

"So there is still an 'if' in the case," wrote Reed, "but it is no longer in italics."

Mrs. Travers was positively startled at the change in Mr. Ford's appearance when he presented himself on the appointed evening. He looked years older, greyer, thinner, less erect, and ghastly pale.

"You must have been ill indeed, Mr. Ford," said the young widow kindly as she gave him her hand.

"I have been somewhat seriously unwell, which was very inconvenient, as my services were much wanted. But, Mrs. Travers, to see you here—here, in this mean abode. It

is more almost than I can bear!" His voice failed, and he sat down hastily, as if unable to stand.

"Dear me! Have a glass of wine, or a little brandy and water," cried Fanny, quite melted from her hardness of heart by the evident feeling of the obnoxious Mr. Ford.

"Nothing, I thank you—nothing. And, Mrs. Travers, it is astonishing to see how well you bear yourself under such a reverse! And how well you look!"

"I am quite well, and far from hopeless."

"May I ask if you intend to remain here, or-"

"I have made no plan as yet," returned Mrs. Travers quickly. "In fact, I cannot until Mr. Reed has made some arrangements which he has kindly undertaken for me; but we think of going on the Continent."

"On the Continent!" he repeated; and then went on with the sort of deprecatory smile and slight catch in his voice which Mrs. Travers always thought an indication that he was forcing himself to say something he knew to be disagreeable. "It has been some slight consolation to me to reflect that at least you possessed jewels of considerable value. I well remember filling up the cheques to pay for them. And it has struck me that my services might be useful in disposing of them."

Mrs. Travers coloured vividly. This determination still to interfere in her affairs roused a degree of indignation quite disproportioned to the cause; but she carefully restrained herself.

"You are very good, Mr. Ford; but Mr. Reed has undertaken that matter; so I need not trespass on you. You must be fully occupied, and I fear not equal to much exertion."

Ford looked down and wiped his brow. "I felt obliged to crawl back to the office the day before yesterday," he said, "and there I saw Sir Hugh Galbraith. I cannot say he made a favourable impression upon me. He is a cold, haughty, overbearing man, who, though passably civil, evidently looks upon all the employés of the house as infinitely beneath him. Even if the firm is still kept on, nothing would tempt me to continue in his employment."

"And is the old firm to be broken up?" asked Mrs. Travers, with deep interest, remembering sadly her own dreams on this subject.

"I do not know certainly; but I think so.

The refusal of Mr. Gervais to act under the will has, I believe, greatly annoyed Sir Hugh. He is, I understand, anxious to realize, and cut all connection with the City. I had an opportunity of speaking to Sir Hugh Galbraith to-day. When, though much against my inclination, in obedience to your wish, Mrs. Travers, I mentioned Mrs. Bell's case to him, he listened not unfavourably, and said he would consult his solicitors on the subject, and added some remarks very favourable to myself, which yet," added Mr. Ford fervently, "did little to reconcile me to the terrible change of rulers. Sir Hugh Galbraith in your place, my dear lady, is an hourly living torture I—I—cannot stand "—and Mr. Ford again pressed his handkerchief to his brow.

"I trust this man will have some respect for your interests," replied Mrs. Travers, feeling a little puzzled how to reply.

"My interests," he returned, waving his hand, "are of small importance if I only could"—he paused abruptly.

"They are of importance to yourself, at any rate," observed Mrs. Travers, to break the awkward pause which followed.

"Will you excuse me?" said Ford, with a sort of desperate effort to Fanny: "but I have

- a few words to say to Mrs. Travers, which are for her ear alone."
 - "Certainly," replied Fanny, rising.
- "But, Mr. Ford, I have no secrets from Miss Lee," exclaimed Mrs. Travers.
- "Nevertheless, I trust you will grant me a few moments," said that gentleman, his brows slightly contracting as he marked the young widow's substitution of "Miss Lee" for "Fanny," when she spoke of her friend to him.
- "Oh, as you will," returned Mrs. Travers, and Fanny left the room. Then a painful silence ensued. At last Mr. Ford began in a tremulous voice, and evidently contending with some strong emotion. "My dear Mrs. Travers, my head is in such painful confusion I scarce know how to express the thoughts that throng upon me. I have known no rest since the discovery of that hateful will. and over again I have regretted not destroying it—not leaving matters as they were! But to have injured you—to have benefited that haughty, contemptuous fellow? Can you forgive me?" He clasped his hands together in an attitude of entreaty, quite carried away beyond his ordinary conventionality and

studied phraseology by the force of his feelings.

"Pray do not speak in this way, Mr. Ford! I have nothing to forgive. You have simply done your duty—your unavoidable duty," said Mrs. Travers. Then, fixing her earnest eyes full upon him, she added in a lower, graver tone, "And I pity you—pity you deeply."

Ford, with a rapid, involuntary motion, pressed one hand over his eyes, as if to shut out hers; but recovering himself immediately, asked quickly, "Pity me? Why? I know I am wretched, but why do you compassionate me?"

"Because you have been the means of causing mortification and loss to one whom you profess to like and respect."

"You are very cruel," cried Ford, his pale

face flushing.

"I do not mean to be so," returned Mrs. Travers quietly, and still looking at him.

"Perhaps not; but hear me. One purpose of my visit to-night is to inform you Sir Hugh Galbraith has expressed his desire that the legacy of five hundred pounds originally left me by Mr. Travers should be paid over at once. He is pleased to say that I have amply

deserved it, and he cannot understand why it was struck out. Now, Mrs. Travers, I consider this ought to be yours. It is yours. I will never touch it. By all that I hold sacred, I will never touch it. You will take it, will you not?" he urged feverishly, rising from his seat and clasping her hand in a burning, trembling grasp.

Mrs. Travers was much moved, but instantly withdrew from his touch.

"It is a very kind, generous impulse that prompts you, Mr. Ford. I shall always remember your offer with gratitude; but when you are stronger and better able to reflect calmly, you will yourself see the impossibility of my acceptance."

"I do not see it. The money is of no value to me. I have lived sparingly. I have saved. I have money enough—more than people think; and I am alone—alone!"

"Yes, at present," said Mrs. Travers kindly but firmly, with the indefinable tone of superiority which always subdued, yet maddened Ford. "But you are quite young enough to form the closest ties—to create a home for yourself; and hereafter, when you may want to push the fortunes of your children, you

will be glad of the money you would now give away."

"Never," he cried, walking up and down the room. "Nothing is of value to me, except so far as it is of use to you. I have injured you! I mean, I have involuntarily been the means of injuring you. Let me atone. All that belongs to me is yours—my whole life, if it can be of the slightest use."

"Mr. Ford, these are expressions I cannot listen to. You are unnerved; you are not yourself. You must understand that it is impossible I could entertain such a proposition for a moment. I cannot listen to such wild words."

"But I will speak out for once," cried Ford, greatly agitated. "Why should you despise and turn from me? What is the difference between us? When first I knew you, mine was the best position of the two. I always loved you. I strove and saved to make you my wife; but my master"—with great bitterness—"stepped in and robbed me. And do you think I did not watch how he spoiled your life, and felt nearly mad between a sort of joy to think he was leaving your heart for me, and the bitterest sorrow for you. And then to find you—you that I had always

dreamed of as in a measure dependent on me—assume the mastery, and treat me as a favoured servant. Oh, Mrs. Travers! Oh, Kate! God pardon you for the suffering you have inflicted. Now it is all over. You are poor and alone. I am wealthy compared to you. Take it all! take my whole existence—be my wife. There, I have broken through the strange spell you have always laid upon me. That is my hope—my heart's dearest wish; nothing short of it will satisfy me."

He paused out of breath, his heart heaving, yet not brave enough to diminish by a step the distance between them.

Mrs. Travers was greatly moved; half frightened, half revolted.

"You give me infinite pain," she exclaimed after a moment's pause. "Do you not see how distressing, how shocking it must be to a woman so lately widowed to hear such words from any man? They are almost an insult."

"Then," cried Ford, interrupting her, "when may I speak? Some months hence? Oh! I will wait if——"

"Never dare to address me in the same strain," said Mrs. Travers, her curious antipathy to the unfortunate Ford flaming up into a sudden activity that quite overcame her self-control. "I do not mean any disrespect to you. I know that your position was as good as my own; but I now represent my late husband, and your words are an unseemly anomaly. More. However worthy of regard, it is not always given to men to meet Position out of the queswith reciprocity. tion, you should have seen there was no chance for you with me. We can never meet again. I-I do not want to be harsh or unfeeling, but you have brought this on yourself. How dared you think of me with such feelings during your master's life! We must never meet again."

"Enough," cried Ford; "you have finished your work and restored me some strength. Good evening, Mrs. Travers. In all probability your wish will be fulfilled. We may never meet again; but you may regret it."

With a ghastly pale face and gleaming eyes, full of rage and hatred, Mr. Ford snatched up his hat and departed.

Mrs. Travers sat down to collect and recover herself before meeting Fanny Lee. She was considerably puzzled by her own emotions. Here was she, a democrat by conviction, recognizing the right of men to work their way up from the lowest rung of the social ladder.

Why should she be so indignant with her husband's managing clerk for raising his eyes to her? Had it been Tom Reed, or another Mr. Travers, or even that starched Mr. Wall—her acquaintance with gentlemen was very limited -she would no doubt have refused them all, and thought they were rather premature; but she would have done so with tenderness and sympathy and certainly without indignation. Why, then, did she feel so angry and degraded in her own eyes? Is it because Nature has her own nobles, amid which Mr. Ford certainly held no place? But then, did Tom, or Mr. Wall, or even Mr. Travers? Yes; these men had reached manhood. They were straightforward, and gifted with the average pluck of every day. Mr. Ford was not unkindly or uncultivated; he was very nearly a gentleman. It was the sort of nameless moral slinking—a constant soreness at the non-recognition of claims he dared not uphold—a serpent-like mingling of the crawl and the sting, from which Mrs. Travers shrank revolted and antagonistic.

"And perhaps this is all owing to some defect in the circulation, or the nerves, or some of the marvellous mechanism by which the inner self works," she thought. "Why.

then, do I feel disgust instead of compassion? Is this instinct in me wrong or false, and ought I to control it with reason? Heigh-ho! I shall find no time for such puzzles when I am matching wools and tracing patterns at Pierstoffe. I wish I was there now."



CHAPTER XI.

HE next morning brought a welcome distraction to Mrs. Travers's thoughts in the shape of an answer from the agent to whom she had written for

further information respecting the fancy business. He stated that the price asked included furniture and fittings, which were certainly worth two hundred pounds, and suggested a personal interview, as there were other parties making inquiries, and she had better not lose time.

This communication sent her in haste to try and catch Tom Reed before he left his chambers for the day; but she missed him, and she was obliged to wait with what patience she could till evening brought him to reply to an urgent note.

"Four hundred pounds," said their kindly mentor; "four of my teeth sooner! Look here, Mrs. Travers, I have been making all sorts of inquiries, and I imagine the seaside party will jump at three hundred; if not, an additional ten or fifteen will clinch the matter,—that is to say, unless you take my advice and give it up. And I have seen my Lancashire friend. He has been making inquiries, too, and is willing to give three hundred for the diamonds; that is not so bad, and I think you had better take it. You would not get so much from any jeweller."

"Oh, what a mean, stingy creature your Lancashire friend must be. Did you tell him what they cost?" cried Fanny.

"Indeed I did not, or he would not have offered so much."

"Tom!" exclaimed Mrs. Travers, "I have a sudden inspiration. I will not sell any more. The diamonds are your friend's at his price. Get the money as soon as you can, but all the rest I will take to those people you call 'Relatives.'"

"I Lombardi!" asked Tom; "pawnbrokers—not to be unintelligible?"

- "Exactly. They may give me more than the jewellers, thinking that I will release them."
- "Relatives of that class are not given to flights of imagination," remarked Tom.
- "At any rate, I shall have the chance of redeeming them; and if I disprove that will, I shall," said Mrs. Travers.

Tom shook his head; while Fanny observed parenthetically, "And you will! as sure as I see Tom shaking his head, and making himself ridiculous." Mrs. Travers went on, not heeding the interruption.

- "At the worst, they can but go. Then I need not part with all at once, you know. Will you help me in this too, Tom?"
- "It is not such a bad idea," said her chivalrous counsellor; "and in your cause I'll beard every 'uncle' in London in his own particular den."
 - "You are a darling," said Fanny.
- "You're another," retorted her cousin.

 "And remember, Mrs. Travers," he continued,

 "you are on no account to go near those Sise

 Lane people without me. It would be the
 spider and the fly over again."

The progress of a transaction such as Kate Travers, with Reed's help, was now trying to bring to a conclusion, though deeply interesting to the parties concerned, is not exciting to read about. Suffice it to say, the bargain was accomplished with the proviso that Mrs. Travers was to inspect the shop and house herself and personally test the business by residing on the premises for a fortnight, before paying over the price, which was to be, as Tom suggested, three hundred pounds for all."

"Pierstoffe, Maltshire," read Tom Reed from a "Guide Book," the evening after matters had so far been arranged. "Population, 7,372\frac{1}{6}."

"You have added the half yourself, surely, Tom."

"Silence, Fanny, do not interrupt the lecture. A picturesque and rising town, in much request as a bathing-place. It commands a fine prospect of cliff and sea, and several blocks of commodious houses have lately been erected. Hotels: 'The Marine Hotel,' 'The Queen's,' and 'The Robinson Crusoe.' Objects of interest in the neighbourhood: Colnebrook Castle, the seat of Sir Hervey Brooke, Bart., D.L.; Acol Court, the residence of Colonel Craycroft, J. P.; Weston, formerly a moated grange; and the ruins of St. Olave's Priory, all within an easy drive. Distance

from London, four hours and fifteen minutes. Express, three hours and a half."

"I shall always travel express when I come to see you," said Tom, shutting up his book. "But I am afraid a population of 7,372 will not supply custom to the extent of twenty pounds a week, as that man asserted were the trade returns of the 'Berlin Bazaar.'"

"No; I do not expect so much as that," observed Mrs. Travers. "But remember—he said in the season. By the way, I am glad our future abode has a title already. I would rather not have an assumed name over the shop."

"Yes; by the way, I observed Hook addressed you as Mrs. Temple."

"I do not intend to resume that of Travers until I regain the property that ought to go with it," said Mrs. Travers, closing her mouth tightly. "So begin to practise at once, Fanny."

"I am sure I shall never remember."

"Is it wise to change your name?" asked Reed.

"Yes, dear Tom; I want to be altogether lost for awhile. I shall be happier for feeling I have left no traces."

"And who would trace you?"

"Oh, I do not know—Mr. Ford, perhaps. And then that horrid man is tormenting me to accept his miserable offer of an allowance. I had another note from Mr. Wall to-day: I am sure Sir Hugh feels insecure, or he would not press the matter."

Tom shook his head incredulously.

"I should not be surprised if he induced Mr. Ford to persecute me about it," Mrs. Travers went on. "And now, Tom and Fanny, for my latest scheme. I am to go down to Pierstoffe on Wednesday—this is Saturday—on Monday our week in these lodgings expires. Fanny and Mills must live somewhere while I am studying trade under the excellent young lady whom Mr. Hook describes as left in charge. I propose that we all go over to Boulogne. I know it a little; I was at school there for a few months before I went to Germany; apartments are cheap; I shall leave Fanny there with Mills until I am ready to receive them, and return on Wednesday to go down to Pierstoffe. You see," (drawing a paper from her pocket) "a steamer sails for Boulogne from London Bridge on Monday evening at six. thus give every one the slip, and will be able, when writing to Mr. Wall, to say with truth that I leave London for the Continent on Monday. You will keep our heavy boxes, Tom, and guard my address religiously."

To this, after some discussion and remonstrances from Fanny, who strongly objected to be left alone with Mills, all agreed.

Monday was a close, damp day, with an occasional drizzle of rain, most depressing to the spirits, and poor Fanny's were at the lowest ebb. Mrs. Mills was calm and re-Her beloved mistress had talked signed. long and confidentially with her, and succeeded in piercing the rough and bristly exterior husk of the old woman's nature, and touching the sound, good heart that lay within; so for awhile Mills was lifted above her crotchets and ill tempers, and graciously promised to take care of Fanny. Mrs. Travers was the unflagging leader of the expedition, for Tom Reed, in his ardent sympathy and efforts to console his cousin, was less efficient than usual.

"I'll come and see you, Fanny, in a week or ten days—I will, indeed. I will run over next Saturday till Monday, and by that time you and Mrs. Mills will be qualified to lionise me all over 'our French watering-place,' as Dickens calls it." "But it will cost you such a heap of money," said the tearful Fanny.

They were now somewhat tightly packed in a cab, and somewhat painfully crawling through the City.

- "Who is that man?" cried Tom, sharply, to Mrs. Travers.
 - "What man?"
- "The man that just passed now, and crossed under the horse's nose—you bowed to him."
- "Oh, that was one of poor Mr. Travers's clerks—Poole—the witness to the will."
 - "Yes, I remember him now."
- "Why, that was the man we saw the other day in the Park, speaking to your shabby friend," said Fanny, "was it not, Tom?"

"I think you must be mistaken."

At last they reached the steamer, Tom Reed exerting himself to the last to secure what comfort he could for them in that abode of misery, the ladies' cabin. He bid Fanny a private adieu at the foot of the companion ladder, and then followed Mrs. Travers, who had gone on deck. "Good-bye! God bless you! You are the best of good fellows, Tom," she said, holding his hand in both her own.

"And you—I can only say you are no end of a brick. Good-bye; you will be off in another moment," and Tom hurried on shore.

Pierstoffe was not unfaithfully described, in the advertisement which had fascinated Kate Travers, as a thriving town. Originally a fishing and smuggling village, the latter line of business had created a certain degree of wealth, and the style of houses which the successful owners of the various schooners and luggers plying between Pierstoffe and the coasts of France and Holland built for themselves in later years were of a very superior description from the lowly cottages which used to cluster round the "point," as it was emphatically called. The point being the southern promontory in which a bold range of cliffs ended, and which sheltered the wide open bay from the prevalent winds. But the cottages, the original nucleus from which Pierstoffe had sprung, had been pulled down more than ten years before, and an enterprising builder had erected in their place, and on the very verge of the shore, a huge, square, hideous marine hotel, with a sea wall and a terrace, a ladies' bathing place at one side, and, screened from observation, a gentleman's on the other.

Having accomplished this patriotic work, he smashed up, and other men entered into his labours.

Pierstoffe began to look up, and a row of lodging-houses were built close down on the sea, and in front of a little, narrow, tortuous street of shabby shops which crept along the base of the overhanging cliffs, to where they sunk somewhat suddenly into a valley which widened as it ran inland, and where the sweep of the bay compelled the new houses to cease, and permit some of the better and later edifices of old Pierstoffe still to face the sea, and a wide slip on which the pleasure-skiffs lay drawn up for hire, where the fishing-boats came in, and the weather-beaten fishermen disentangled their silvery, scaly treasures from the dark-brown nets.

Here the old coach-road turned inwards, and a few furlongs further on bifurcated, one line ascending by steep zigzags to the northern heights, the other leading away down the valley to where the open country, rich in cornfields and pastures, with patches of woodland sheltered by the high cliffs from easterly gales, afforded first-rate sport to a fox-hunting gentry. Further on, past the slip, were the most genteel, the most costly, and the newest

houses in Pierstoffe, called the North Parade, behind which the cliffs again rose to a great Many improvements were being carried on. A branch line from the "East Mercian, Stoneborough, and Barmouth Junction" had been brought by a tunnel almost to the door of the Marine Hotel, and a small pier was being built also near that favoured spot, where summer sailors might more conveniently land from their pretty vessels. There was a library and a reading-room also, where a visitor's book was kept, and there was talk of a yacht club; but they had got no further than erecting a flag-staff before the library on the esplanade, whence the flag of the club was to float whenever the one and the other had been called into existence.

Such were the principal features of the residence Mrs. Travers had chosen. She was very weary, and consequently dispirited when she reached her destination by the last train. It was dusk, but not quite dark, and she could trace the outlines of the cliffs and bay as she stood on the open space before the hotel, while a porter called a cab—or, as it is usually called out of London, "a fly" (will some Max [Müller of the future account for this variation in the growth of language?).

The soft salt breeze (it was a lovely April night) came to her cheek like a caress. The breath of the sea seemed to call back her scattered forces, and she had roused herself from the weariness of spirit which hung upon her since she had parted with Fanny and Mills, by the time a very stuffy conveyance had rattled her over some rough pavement, and through a street so narrow that she wondered the jolting did not overturn her vehicle into a shop window on the right hand or on the left. Then she felt once more in the open, and heard the gentle dash of the waves as the driver drew up at a corner house.

"This is it, ma'am—'The Berlin Bazaar."

"Will you please stop at the private door round the corner?" said a shrill, treble voice, and a dim figure, tall and narrow, appeared at the shop door.

A small boy was putting up the shutters (the early "closing movement" had always been moving at Pierstoffe), [who hastily desisted and ran round to carry up the luggage. The next moment Mrs. Temple (as we must call her in future) stood in a short, wide, low, panneled passage, where a thin, angular female, with flat bands of hair secured by a

couple of rows of narrow black velvet and a high back-comb, held a tall thin candle in a brass candlestick. She was evidently an elderly young lady, with a sweet simper, which displayed very large teeth - in fact, her bony system was largely developed. produced on Mrs. Temple a general impression of being brown. Her dress was brown merino, so tightly and accurately fitting, that it conveyed the idea that she had been melted down and poured into a brown mould. neat collar was fastened with a brown bow of ribbon, her hands were covered with brown leather mittens, and her complexion was not many shades lighter.

"Mrs. Temple, I am sure I am very glad you have arrived," she said with a gracious bend, which made the composite grease of her candle drip over. "I expected you somewhat earlier."

"Miss Potter, I suppose?" returned the young widow pleasantly. "I hoped to have been here earlier, but I have had a long journey."

"Dear, dear, I dare say you are quite overcome with fatigue. Here, Sarah, take up Mrs. Temple's box. Perhaps you will step into our little sitting-room at once." And Miss Potter, with the most scrupulous politeness, and holding the candle above her head, opened a side door and ushered her guest into a long, low room, also panneled, with a narrow door at the opposite angle from where they entered, and beside it, stretching towards the fire-place, was a long window, not more than one pane in height, but many in width, across which hung a muslin curtain.

A small fire burned in an old-fashioned grate, with wide hobs and extensive "cheeks," to limit its dimensions, and before it stood a three-legged iron stand, or "footman," supporting a carefully covered dish. A table set with tea-things stood near the window, and a small copper kettle hummed upon the fire.

"I am very thankful to be here," said Mrs. Temple, looking round her, not displeased by the aspect of things, as she untied her bonnet and laid it aside. "I hope my late arrival has caused you no inconvenience."

"Oh, none in the least, I assure you, ma'am," said Miss Potter, bustling about actively to get the tea. "And I think you will like the place and the business. Poor Mrs. Browne, the late owner, as nice a woman as ever lived, did not make it what it might

be, as I have told her times and times; but it is steady, and regular, and particularly genteel." Miss Potter, when not excited. talked in a loud impressive whisper. is like keeping a stall at a fancy fair, in a manner of speaking. Indeed, I tell my brother --- my brother is in Australia in a very large way of business, and I am going out to him. I should have done so long since, but that I could not leave Mrs. Browne: for as she said to me over and over again, 'If you leave me, Maria' (my name is Maria), 'my whole dependence is gone; for Mrs. Penny' (that is her daughter) 'is not exactly the sort of'-but there, censoriousness is not my line. Poor dear soul, I was her whole stay."

By this time Miss Potter had wandered through so many parentheses, that she had forgotten what she had told her brother, so wisely dropped the subject, and allowed Kate to take her tea in comparative quiet.

Although her acquaintance with Miss Potter soon came to an end, and she dropped out of her life altogether, Kate Travers never forgot the relief which the even flow of her unoffending though very small talk proved on that trying night. It gave a welcome tinge

of the ludicrous to the awful strangeness of her position; it held back the rising tide of sorrowful, half indignant recollections that threatened to engulf her courage and composure, as gently sloping sandy beaches hold back the ocean. Then the bird's-eye view of the "business" which her ready intelligence gathered from this chatter, roused her interest in what had now become her career, and so the first evening, in what was to be her new home, passed over less painfully than she expected.

She woke early the next morning, and soon was up and dressed. A fresh breeze from the south-east was crisping the bay into short tossing foam-crested waves, and dashing them with a sound full of haste and vigour upon the slip before described, and which her window overlooked. The bright clear sunshine, the wide stretch of open sea, the tall cliffs which sheltered the little town to the north. and of which she caught a glimpse on her left, all seemed to her very good. Her spirit roused itself in response to the tumultuous activity of the nature she gazed upon, and seemed to promise her success. To succeed in a "Berlin Bazaar," is not an "o'er-vaulting ambition," scarcely in accord with the

idea of "deep calling unto deep," which certainly suggested itself to the young widow, as she stood gazing at the wild play of the waters, and conscious of the sympathy between her inner self and the speechless world without; the "voice" of which is yet so articulate. But not to succeed in this humble enterprise, implied so terrible a defeat, such an incapacity on her part to judge for herself, and to stand alone, that success was thrown up into colossal proportions by the depth of shadow behind it. Shaking off her thought fit, Mrs. Temple, as she schooled herself to think she was, descended to the parlour, where she had partaken of tea the night before, and found a small girl in a long sort of linen bib that reached from her throat to her insteps, setting the breakfast things; she stopped short and dropped a staccato courtesy when she perceived the strange lady, continuing to gaze at her with a scared expression and without moving.

"I suppose you are the housemaid?" said Mrs. Temple, good-naturedly seeking to break the spell by the charm of speech.

"Yes 'm,—and I does the cooking, too 'm; only mother comes in twice a week to help clean up. Leastways, she used—but I does

all for Miss Potter, now," said the small statue, restored to consciousness.

"Is Miss Potter up yet?" asked Mrs. Temple, measuring the child in her mind, and conjecturing whether she might do for an assistant to Mills—for Mills could not manage everything quite alone.

"Oh, yes 'm! Miss Potter is dusting of the shop. I was to tell her when you comed down,—I'll just get the kettle."

Though April was drawing to a close, a fire was not unacceptable in the chill freshness of a sea-side morning, and Mrs. Temple had placed one foot upon the fender, when Miss Potter came in through the narrow door which led into the shop.

"Dear, dear, I did not know you were down. I hope you have not been waiting long." Miss Potter held a feather-broom and a duster, and another cleaner duster was tied over her head. She was attired in a print morning-wrapper, washed out to a dim ochre tint. "I told that girl to let me know directly you were down; but she is so stupid."

Mrs. Temple exonerated the girl, and Miss Potter went on:

"I am glad you are an early riser—I alvol. I. 15

ways was—and it's a great thing here. You see, ours is that sort of a genteel business, that there is no need to open much before ten. Indeed, for that matter, before eleven, only for the appearance! and one can get a great deal done between an eight o'clock breakfast and ten—as you will find. I think you said you never were in business before?"

"Never," said Kate.

Miss Potter shook her head gloomily as she made the tea. "Business is uphill work for them that haven't been brought up to it."

"Yet, it cannot be so mysterious that a woman of my age cannot learn it," replied Kate; and added, smiling, "with your good help."

"Oh, I am sure I am willing to do the best I can; and I can't help thinking that a little outlay would fetch up the business wonderfully. I always told poor dear Mrs. Browne that she starved it! Indeed, at one time, when I thought of taking it myself, I used to be rather annoyed. Then, poor Mrs. Browne had heavy expenses. Now, you see, you have no husband," as if this was an enormous advantage in an economic point of view. "At least—you'll excuse me—I understood you were a widow?"

"I am," said Mrs. Temple smiling; while her eyes filled with tears at the recollection of the husband who had so carefully guarded her from all of pain, save what his own jealous love inflicted.

"Poor Mrs. Browne suffered a deal with hers. I am sure I little thought she would go before him!" in a slightly injured tone, as if Providence had made a decided mistake. "But, though I do not mean the least disrespect to you, I can't say I have any right to like widows!"

"I am sorry to hear it! May! I ask why?" "Well," with a deep sigh, "if it wasn't for one, I would be in a very different position to what I am." Whereupon Miss Potter plunged into a very lengthy parenthetical history of certain love passages which had passed between herself and one of the assistants at Mr. Turner's. This was the shop par excellence of Pierstoffe—a most elegant young man from London - quite a "millingtary" looking man; but a designing widow (nothing at all to look at), the widow of a small farmer in the neighbourhood, had won him from her, and they were now married and established in quite a large business in Stoneborough. "She had a little money," concluded Miss

Potter, with a deep sigh, "and I believe he has never regretted it but once, and that was always."

"Probably it was the widow's money, not the widow, which attracted him," began Mrs. Temple in a consolatory tone; but she was interrupted by a sharp click and the convulsive tinkle of a little bell, whereupon Miss Potter started to her feet, exclaiming, "Dear, dear, I had no idea the time was running on so," and darted into the shop.

Mrs. Temple, wondering at the revelations she had just heard, almost as much as if one of the wooden dolls of a past generation had opened its vermilion lips to speak of a heart within, could not resist looking with some curiosity through the wide, low window from which the blind was partially withdrawn. A small child in hobnailed shoes, whose snubby nose was scarce on a level with the counter, was holding up a penny in a paw as brown as the coin, and Miss Potter was drawing forth a skein of black wool from a carefully papered parcel.

"My first customer," thought Kate, "and a specimen of the gentility of my business! I shall do away with that bell; it reminds me of poor old Sally Martin's sweety shop at

Cullingford, where Tom used to spend so many pennies."

Here Miss Potter returned, and proposed to show her over the house before anyone else came.

It was a better sort of abode than Mrs. Temple had hoped for. Only two stories high, it was larger than it looked; for, being built on a corner piece of ground, its depth was greater than its frontage. The centre was divided into good square rooms, leaving snippets of space to form curious little crooked chambers, and three-cornered cupboards with odd, unexpected steps leading to them. furniture was scanty but clean, the best things being placed in a sitting-room upstairs, which possessed a large window over the front door, commanding the Stoneborough Road and the new North Parade houses. Next to this was the bedroom which had been prepared for Mrs. Temple. Behind these, somewhat shut in by the high ground at the back, were three other bedrooms. Below, the shop and parlour before described, and at the other side of the hall, a pleasant, retired sitting-room with one large window opening on a neglected garden, which lay between the house and the lower cliff, which there sloped steeply down to the roadway. The kitchen came next, with various convenient offshoots in the shape of sculleries and washhouses.

"If the business will only answer, I have not made a bad bargain," thought Mrs. Temple.

Once or twice in the course of their inspection, Miss Potter had been called away by a shrill yell of "Shop!" from the diminutive girl, and had each time returned breathless, exclaiming at the unusual number of early customers.

- "Poor dear Mrs. Browne was rather fortunate latterly in letting the upstairs rooms. Dr. Slade was a very good friend to her in that way, though he is rather peculiar; but he used to recommend invalid gentlemen—two guineas a week for the season."
- "Oh, she let lodgings?" asked Mrs. Temple, smiling to herself at the turn of Fortune's wheel which had brought her back to the point from whence she had started. "I think I shall do the same; it will lighten the rent."
 - "Oh, considerably, I assure you! but we had better go into the shop now."



CHAPTER XII.

HIS first day was both wearisome and depressing. Mrs. Temple felt bewildered by the effort to understand the mystery of marks and all

the technicalities which the accomplished Miss Potter so glibly poured forth, and cast down by the trifling nature of the sales. A few girls, with broad, country accents, and exceedingly unpolished manners, came in for pennyworths of this and sixpence worth of the other. One young lady (the clergyman's daughter Miss Potter said), asked for some traced muslin-work, which cost the large sum of two shillings and sixpence. And a huge, good-humoured looking farmer with yellow

leggings, a low-crowned hat, a whip, spurs, and a fiery-red face, who called Mrs. Temple "mum," brought a considerably-rubbed Berlinwool pattern, and asked that all the requisite wools might be supplied, and he would call for the parcel on his way home in a couple of hours, which he did, and paid for it standing in the doorway, his face redder than ever, the reins of his nag over one arm, his whip under the other, while he exclaimed at the cost of "such-like darned fiddle-faddles, and hoped his lass would be satisfied now."

"This has not been a fair average day," said Miss Potter, as she counted up the day's gain, and found it amounted to seven shillings and fivepence halfpenny. "In short, I have never known it so low."

"That is curious," said Mrs. Temple dryly, and discouraging."

"It is," returned Miss Potter candidly; "but I wouldn't mind, if I were you. There are many things to account for a temporary depression. It is just after the Easter holidays; and the young ladies at Miss Monitor's have scarcely settled to their work and their studies. And a great archery fête at Colnebrook Castle was to come off yesterday, you see; so none of the county ladies would have time to

think of fancywork the very day after. You must just wait a bit."

And the young widow resolved to be patient, more especially as she liked the look of the place, and felt still more disposed towards it after an evening stroll past the North Parade houses, to where the roadway widened into a gravelled sweep, from which she discovered a narrow path leading along the base of the cliffs, now descending almost to the beach, now climbing steeply up over some projecting crag, which was lashed or caressed by the waves at high water. Following this, in some places, rather giddy footway, Mrs. Temple reached a spot where a sudden inward curve of the cliffs formed a tiny bay. The path she had followed zig-zagged upwards to a coast-guard station, but another branched off, and led gently down a few paces to a little rough wooden jetty, bleached almost ghastly white by the constant wash of the sea; while some outlying standing timbers, set up to break the force of the waves, were covered with black-green seaweed, which, as the tide was now half-high, and coming in, floated mournfully on the waters, like the long locks of some drowning creature. The shelter afforded here had permitted a growth of grass

and brambles mixed with the gorse, now in full yellow bloom, and loading the air with its honeyed sweetness, to tone down the rugged grandeur of the cliff, and in the deeper hollow where the slope was least steep, and more of soil would lie, a small group of stunted oak-trees nestled, throwing out thick gnarled branches with the ungainly strength of mis-shapen dwarfs.

The utter silence, the unspeakable repose, enchanted Kate. She descended to the little pier, and strolled leisurely along it, resting for a while on the low bench at the end, and drinking in the loveliness of sea and sky. By-and-by, a grey-bearded coastguard-man, in a little boat, pulled round one of the points which sheltered the bay, and fastened his skiff to the pier, ascending by a straight sort of ladder made between the timbers, with a goodly basket of fish on his arm, and a loose heap of brown net on his shoulder. He gave Mrs. Temple a friendly "good even," and they exchanged a little talk. Then watched him lazily as he walked up the path, after having spread out his net to dry, and looked into a sort of cave, half-natural, half-artificial, where a large six-oared boat was safely stowed.

"What a relief it will be sometimes to come here after the toils of the day," said Mrs. Temple as she rose, wonderfully re-"If I can at all make freshed, to return. an existence, I will stay here." And, as she mused, the memory of the last time she had sat in the open air came back to her, with Sir Hugh Galbraith's cruel words, which had so often sounded in her ear since. never breathed them to any one; she never would, but not the less clearly were they remembered. Generally, the thought roused indignation, and a fierce desire to show that, at any rate, she had held the same place in her husband's estimation from first to last, by proving that the will which had robbed her, to enrich him, was false; but to-night the loneliness, the beauty of her surroundings, inclined her to a kind of melancholy regret that she should be so misjudged, so cruelly wronged! It was sad, too, after a glimpse of all that life might have given to her, young, rich in a sense of enjoyment, and rich enough in material wealth, to be suddenly cast out into the outer world of poverty and hard "I must not be false to my own principles," she thought, rallying her forces as she hurried on, slightly alarmed by the increasing

darkness. "Work is a good in itself. All I hope is that Fanny will not find life insupportably dull here. I shall not keep her long, that I can see. It will be terrible to be without her."

Miss Potter's astonishment was loud when she found where Mrs. Temple had directed her evening walk. "Dear, dear, it is such a lonely, dismal place! I don't think even the visitors go there, unless indeed in a party, to gather seaweed at the cove when the tide is out."

The succeeding day was considerably more animated. Some young ladies on horseback rode in from one of the neighbouring places, and made quite a clatter outside, while one of the attendant grooms came in for a variety of articles, and Miss Potter herself had to go out and receive directions.

Later in the day, a very tall, thin, elderly gentleman, with glittering black eyes and rather hectic colour, thin iron-grey hair, brushed back from a bony brow, a huge shirt frill, and a long single-breasted green coat, came in with some importance.

"Good-morning, good-morning!" — knocking the top of his hunting-whip against the brim of his hat. "All blooming, I see. And

this is our new proprietress—eh—eh?"—a keen stare at Mrs. Temple, with slightly knitted brow.

"Yes, Dr. Slade," simpered Miss Potter; "this is Mrs. Temple."

The doctor knocked his whip against his hat again, and Mrs. Temple bent her head with a sudden strange feeling of being out of her place—the introduction was so unlike anything she had ever experienced before.

"Well, ma'am," said the doctor, "shall you let lodgings, like your predecessor, or have you a tribe of children to overflow into the nooks and crannies of this old Noah's Ark?"

Mrs. Temple had time to school herself while she spoke, and was ready to answer with a smile when he ceased.

"I dare say I shall let lodgings, Dr. Slade; but I scarcely yet know what I shall do."

"Well, you had better let me know when you make up your mind. I am the dispenser of fortune, as well as physic, in this direction. I fancy I'll have a couple of invalids on my hands this season; but you must give better cooking than the last sufferer had. Chops frightened by frizzling till they were black in the face, by jingo! That's not nutritious diet."

"But my chops, if I ever have the honour of serving any to your patients, shall 'blush celestial rosy red' at their own perfection," said Mrs. Temple, laughing good-humouredly.

The doctor stared for a moment, and then cried, "Shall they? By Jupiter! those are the sort of chops, and you are the sort of woman that will do." Then, turning to Miss Potter, he asked, "Have you, among the rubbish of your nonsensical bazaar, a piece of court-plaister? I know I have none; and a — bramble caught my hand here" (holding it out) "as I was cutting across a corner of the dingle, after being kept nearly an hour listening to that old blockhead, Farmer Owen, maundering about his inside. So I thought I would give you a chance before going on to the chemist."

"Dear, dear, what a bad place," said Miss Potter sympathisingly; "and I am really afraid we don't keep such a thing as courtplaister."

"I ought to have known better than to have looked for anything useful here," retorted the doctor, with an awful scowl.

And then an instinctive "trade" impulse stirred our young widow to exclaim, "If it is not in the shop, Dr. Slade, I have some in my dressing-case. I will bring it, and put it on for you, if you will promise never to go elsewhere for your court-plaister in future."

"Done!" cried the doctor, slapping his hand against his leg; "but mind you don't let yourself be out of it. By George!" he continued, as Mrs. Temple left the shop, "that's a clever baggage! Why she would buy and sell you and poor Mrs. Browne, before you would know where you were."

"She is very pleasant, I am sure; but rather inexperienced—new to business—and depends a great deal upon me," returned Miss Potter, with her sweetest smile.

"Depends upon you!" repeated the doctor with anything but flattering emphasis. "Who is she? Where did you pick her up?"

"Oh, I know nothing of Mrs. Temple, except that she answered the advertisement about the business, and that she comes from London."

"London is a wide place," said the doctor. Here Mrs. Temple returned with the required plaister, and proceeded coolly and dexterously to cut and affix it, undisturbed by the doctor's announcement that he was in a desperate hurry; that he had left his horse outside with the reins over a post, and he

dared say he would chuck them off and run away, to the damage of all juvenile Pierstoffe.

"Do you want to test my nerve?" said Mrs. Temple, suddenly lifting her soft eyes to his with a smile, which produced a very different effect from poor Miss Potter's.

"I fancy you are equal to it, if I do," said the doctor, with a sort of grim gallantry. "You are a deuced wide-awake young woman, my dear."

"Thank you," returned Mrs. Temple gravely. "There; I think that will keep your hand comfortable. Remember, in future you are to come here for your courtplaister."

"That's a bargain," cried Dr. Slade; "and, moreover, I shall make my wife buy all her stuff to knit my socks with here—that is to say, if what you sell isn't rotten."

"Thank you, again," said Mrs. Temple.

"Mrs. Slade always did patronise us," simpered Miss Potter.

"Did she? I know she used to send for balls of worsted yarn—what do you call it?—to Stoneborough—ay, to London. Don't you believe all she told you. Good-morning to you." Another knock of the whip against his hat, and the doctor strode away.

"Your doctor seems something of a character," said Mrs. Temple, looking after him.

"Oh, indeed, he is a most extraordinary man. He was looked upon as quite the king of Pierstoffe; but I think things are a little different now. There is a new doctor here a quiet, grave, exceedingly genteel young man -who is making his way wonderfully even with the best families in the town. But Dr. Slade still keeps in with the county people. You see he hunts with the gentry, and they are used to him; but it is said that young Mr.—I mean Dr.—Bryant made one or two extraordinary cures of people that had gone on years and years with Dr. Slade. Any way, Dr. Slade hates the other like poison, and abuses and swears at him quite awful; but Dr. Bryant, I am told, never mentions Dr. Slade but with the greatest respect. young doctor is not married, and that made matters worse when Miss Monitor called him in; every one said that an elderly—not to say old married man, was the proper person for a young ladies' school (though there are very curious stories told of Dr. Slade some years back). But Miss Monitor declared that a great London doctor said if Miss Goldfrass (that's a great heiress, who is at the school) was ill,—and she generally is,—no one was to be called in but Dr. Bryant. Then he is so regular at church; and poor Dr. Slade never darkens the door of church or chapel."

"Not a very pleasant account," said the young widow thoughtfully. "Still, I seem fated to accept this rather rampant Hakeem for my partisan."

"What did you say?" asked Miss Potter, puzzled.

"Oh, that Dr. Slade seemed inclined to be friendly. What is his wife like?"

"A very nice lady indeed, but that timid and nervous it makes one uncomfortable. I believe she was a great beauty once, but there is very little of it left now."

Ten days flew away with wonderful rapidity, and Kate Travers was astonished to find how quickly things, so new and strange, were growing familiar. The hardest nut of all was to take kindly and easily to the peculiar style of civility with which women, often her inferiors, never her superiors, addressed her, as some one quite out of their sphere. But she was too sensible not to school herself to look on this as a mere accident of business, not touching her real position.

"I hope when Fanny comes she will not

be thoughtless and offend people, our fellowcitizens in trade," mused Kate; "for it will not do to hold aloof, and make ourselves un-After all, they have the same popular. natures, the same objects in life, the same affections; the difference only lies in our exterior coats of varnish. What an amount of vulgar ignorance exists among nominally educated ladies, who speak correctly, and are sufficiently well bred not to rub you the wrong way unless it suits them! Women are generally tolerable, but men without the 'outward and visible' signs of gentlemen, must be dreadful, and yet real gentlemen must be exceedingly rare in every class. there is knowledge to be gained from every fresh page in the book of life, and ere long I shall turn to another."

Then, as usual, her thoughts flew away to the standing obstacle of her life. She counted largely on what old Gregory's son would have to tell of his father's communications, touching the will he had witnessed, and was supposed to have written. But when would he return? She had carefully kept up a correspondence with his sister, Mrs. Bell, who had told her that she had received a handsome present from Sir Hugh Galbraith,

that she had quite re-established her school, and hoped to do well; but there was still no news of her brother.

As the fortnight progressed Mrs. Temple saw, or imagined she saw, her way to a fair amount of success in the new life she had adopted. Many things were asked for which were not in stock, and she thus gathered ideas as to the further development of the business already existing at the Berlin Bazaar. Moreover, a judicious selection of magazines and periodicals, sent by the indefatigable Tom, took Pierstoffe by surprise, and acted favourably on other branches of her trade.

She, therefore, made up her mind to close with the agent, and with infinite pleasure wrote for Fanny and Mills to join her. With what delight she looked forward to seeing them once more, after being plunged in such a flood of strangeness! All this time she had had frequent letters from Fanny, written in better spirits than the faithful little soul really felt; on one point they were unanimous, Mills was perfectly angelic. "If she had not a tolerably fair appetite, I should think she was going to die," concluded Fanny in one of her epistles. Tom had paid his promised visit, and was more delightful and audacious

7.

than ever. So the young widow's mind had been kept tranquil in the direction of Boulogne.

It was the day after she had despatched her letter of recall, and market-day besides, so they had been quite busy all the morning. Now dinner time was past, and the little shop had been empty for a few minutes-Miss Potter was absent—when the door was suddenly darkened by the entrance of an exceedingly large lady, tall as well as stout, richly dressed in a thick violet silk, a black velvet mantle trimmed with costly lace, a green velvet and satin bonnet with crimson roses. and Brussels lace veil, a chain round her neck, and bracelets slipping down on the fat, pudgy hands, which were tightly crammed into violet gloves; one of them held a violet and lace parasol, the other a ribbon, the other end of which was fastened to a painfully corpulent pug, at whose collar a little ball-like bell tinkled perpetually. All this finery, it must be confessed, looked like every-day gear, not Sunday clothes, on the stout lady, who waddled into the middle of the shop, and then, gazing full at Mrs. Temple with little, sharp, green-grey eyes, exclaimed in a fat voice, but with a good accent and pleasant manner, "I do not think I ever saw you before! Where is Miss Potter?"

"She has only just left the shop, and will be here directly."

"And, in the meantime, have you any materials for this sort of lace-work?" resumed the lady, taking a small parcel from her pocket, and opening it.

Mrs. Temple examined it with much interest. "I am sorry to say we have not, nor have I seen anything like it in England."

"Then, have you been lately on the Continent?" asked her customer quickly.

"I came from France ten days ago."

"Oh, indeed! Well, and what am I to do about the work? There is a young lady staying with me—a charming girl, but very delicate—and quite crazy about this work. I promised to bring her back patterns, and everything."

"I am exceedingly sorry not to have it. Could the young lady wait three days, and she shall have several patterns to choose from?" said Mrs. Temple, thinking of Fanny's arrival.

"I dare say she would. It would take as long to send to town. Oh, Miss Potter, how do you do?" as that individual returned.

- "What is going to be done now? Has the Berlin Bazaar been sold? Are you going to desert us?"
- "Well, my lady, I suppose I shall be going out to my brother soon. Can I get you anything this morning?"
- "Yes; there is a list of cottons and tapes my maid gave me. And tell me—how is poor old Mr. Browne? has he gone to live with his daughter?"
- "He is pretty well—at least was—when I heard last. He is not living with Mrs. Penny."
- "Well, he ought! Where has she sent him?"
- "Oh, he is quite comfortable, I assure you, my lady. He is boarded with a very respectable party quite near Mrs. Penny's farm."
- "Ah, the respectable party will take the money and starve him, probably."
- "I hope not," replied Miss Potter meekly. She had permitted Mrs. Temple to take the list and select the articles named in it, in order to attend to her ladyship's cross-examination.
- "And who is this person?" continued the stout lady, in an audible aside.

- "Oh, Mrs. Temple; she is going to purchase the business and settle here."
- "Doesn't look the least like business herself." Then to Mrs. Temple, "So you are to be our old friend Mrs. Browne's successor. I hope the Bazaar will be equally successful with you."
- "Thank you," said Mrs. Temple, bowing slightly.
- "But latterly there has been a decided falling off. Miss Potter is always 'just out' of whatever one wants."
- "I shall, of course, renew the stock, and hope to add some useful branches to the business. I have already some of the newest publications."
- "Ah, yes, I see," interrupted her ladyship, wheeling her chair round with a sudden, violent i effort, and beginning to overhaul them. "'Household Words,' 'The Family Herald,' 'The Cheerful Visitor,'—newspapers, too! that's a good idea. And, pray, had you a shop in France, Mrs. Temple?"
- "No," said the young widow gently. She could not bring herself to add "my lady," which slipped so readily from Miss Potter's tongue.

- "Ah, perhaps your husband managed the business?"
 - "He did."
- "Ah, you will be quite a tyro, then. Pray, have you many children?"
 - "I have none."
- "So much the better; so much the better. Children and business do not agree, I imagine. And are you going to live here all alone? Have you any friends in Pierstoffe?"
- "I know no one here; but I shall be joined by a young lady—I mean person," correcting herself with a smile, "who will be my assistant when I lose Miss Potter, who cannot, I fear, stay with me as long as I should wish."
- "Hum! that may do; but you must be very circumspect. You must indeed—a hand-some young woman like you! Are you going to send out circulars?"
- "I shall act on your suggestion," said Mrs. Temple gravely, "as soon as I have finally arranged the purchase."
- "Do; and be sure to send me one. And I tell you what—you ought to give credit. There is so much inconvenience and vulgarity about ready money. I would certainly give three months' credit to residents and the

county, if I were you; but don't trust the visitors; they are a doubtful set."

- "I shall consider it," returned Mrs. Temple.
- "Well, are these my cottons and things?"
- "Yes, my lady."
- "How much does it all come to?"
- "Three and fourpence-halfpenny."
- "What a quantity of money! There, I have only three and threepence, and I do not care to change a sovereign. I will pay the three-half-pence another time. You see "—to Mrs. Temple—"there is a case in point. I feel the cost of those wretched reels of cotton because I see three shillings going out of my hands into yours; but if your account for five pounds, or more, came in at the end of three months, I would write a cheque for it as cheerfully as possible! It is wonderful what a melancholy effect it has seeing the actual coin go away from you. Now I must leave you; I have to pay a visit at No. 6, North Do you know anything of the Parade. people?" To Miss Potter, "Have they been in here?"

Miss Potter professed complete ignorance.

"I know nothing about them," continued the stout lady; "but a cousin of mine in town begged me to call; there is a sick child or some such reason for coming here so early. Good-morning. Mind you get the lace patterns, Mrs. Temple. I shall look in soon again, and see how you are getting on." Another unmitigated stare—"I can't help thinking I have seen you somewhere before. Good-morning," and she walked out of the shop with surprising briskness for so heavy a figure.

"And, pray, who is that remarkably curious personage?" cried Mrs. Temple, when she was fairly out of hearing.

"That is one of our great ladies, and best customers," returned Miss Potter. "That is Lady Styles, of Weston. She has a beautiful place about four or five miles away, on the road to Stoneborough. She is a wealthy lady, and quite her own mistress, for Sir Marmaduke Styles is very sickly, and is often away in London for his health; but she is the greatest gossip in the whole country. She will come and buy things here if it was only to crossquestion you, till she finds out everything. She is not ill-natured, I believe, but so dreadfully curious. There is no keeping anything from her."

"I shall try, however," thought Mrs. Temple to herself. "I wonder if she has ever really met me! I think not; I think I should remember her." And Mrs. Temple ran quickly upstairs to write for the post, enjoining Fanny on no account to quit Boulogne without a supply of patterns and materials such as had caught their attention, during the only ramble for which they had had time, in the Rue de l'Ecu.



CHAPTER XIII.

ATE TRAVERS, or rather Mrs. Temple, had not felt so light of heart since the day on which Ford disclosed his unlucky discovery, as

she did when welcoming Fanny and Mills to their new home. First, there was the great joy of having them once more with her—the consciousness of her own courage in having opposed the opinion of those she most regarded, justified as she felt by the strong hope of success in her brave undertaking, and then a certain satisfaction in the pleasantness of the locality where her lot had fallen. She had had tea laid in the best sitting-room, and as she had permitted herself the extravagance

of a man to put the garden in order, and prune its wild luxuriance, things looked their best.

"What a pretty place, Kate! Quite a lady-like room," exclaimed Fanny, who was enjoying her tea with a traveller's appetite. "Do you know, I long to be in the shop, coaxing people to buy all sorts of things they do not want. What is the next article, madam? Is not that the style?"

"Bless me, Miss Fanny, how you do run on!" said Mills.

"I trust you may like it," returned Mrs. Travers. "But you will find standing all day very fatiguing. I did at first, but I have become used to it."

"Must you never sit down?"

"Oh yes, you can, sometimes, when there is nothing to do. But we hope to have very little of that sort of rest."

"Dear, dear!"—a deep sigh from Mills.

"And have any of your neighbours called upon you?" continued Fanny, helping herself to more brown bread and butter. "Do shop-keepers call on each other?"

"I really cannot tell," said Mrs. Temple, smiling. "I am not thoroughly initiated yet. I imagine they have no time for these ceremonies; at any rate, no one has called

upon me except the doctor, and, although he generally buys a pennyworth of this or sixpence worth of the other, I always look upon his visits as personal; he gets so much talk for his money."

"Indeed!" cried Fanny. "And has he a wife? Is he old or young, or nice or nasty, or——"

"Rein up your curiosity a little, Fanny. He has a wife—he is rather old—and I cannot exactly say he is nice."

"My curiosity is at an end, then. Do you know, Mills and I grew rather fond of Boulogne. We would have been quite fond of it had you been there."

"Me fond of it! no, indeed! It's a queer, unnatural place," quoth Mills. "Why, if you even go to thread a needle, the more you twist the thread the more it comes untwisted. And then the soup and the messes! Why, you get up near as hungry as when you sat down."

"All the better for digestion; but come, Kate, let us see your new abode," said Fanny rising.

And then a pleasant excursion through the various nooks and corners, the more dignified apartments and domestic offices of the house, ensued. Fanny expressed the most ardent admiration, and sketched the outline of a romantic tale, as she inspected the principal rooms, which Mrs. Temple intended to let. A melancholy and mysterious invalid, of refined habits and blighted affections, was to occupy them. Mrs. Temple was to soothe his last moments; he was to prove a millionaire, and leave all his wealth "to you," concluded Fanny, "or to me—and then we should go shares!"

"No more wills, if you love me, Fan," said Mrs. Temple, laughing. "Why should he not recover, find balm for his wounded heart, and marry you?"

"Oh! but I couldn't, you know," cried Fanny, and stopped, blushing brightly.

"I know nothing," returned her friend, but I guess a good deal."

Mrs. Mills did not commit herself. She found no fault, neither did she bestow much approval. The "wash'us" was, she admitted, handy, and the cupboards convenient; but this was balanced by considerable doubts touching "no end of work" to keep such a heap of odd corners clean. Then the "girl" underwent a grim examination, from which she evidently drew unfavourable auguries of her own

future, and asked if she might go home "to see mother." Then, as the evening was lovely, and Miss Potter quite willing to take entire charge of the shop for the short time that remained before closing, the young widow proposed a stroll on the beach, as Fanny did not seem very tired.

"Tired! I am as fresh as a lark; ready for anything!" was the reply.

"Here, Miss Fanny," said Mills, coming downstairs at that moment; "here's the parcel you said Mrs. Travers was——"

"Hush!" cried that lady. "Do be careful, Mills. I am Mrs. Temple now. You really must not forget. Give me the parcel!"

"But, Kate," said Fanny, as they left the house together, "it is very hard to remember; and I spoiled ever so many envelopes when I wrote to you. I was sure to have 'Travers' down before I could think. I wish you had not changed it. Was it necessary?"

"Yes; I thought so. I did not like to associate poor Mr. Travers's name with a shop, for I know my being here is not his fault. Besides, I have an odd, obstinate, perhaps stupid dislike to the idea of resuming it again until I have won my rights."

"Heigho!" said Fanny.

"Which means," returned Mrs. Temple, a little sharply, "that Tom has persuaded you that my hopes and convictions are insane crotchets. You think Tom an oracle; but he is not infallible."

"No, indeed, I do not; but he knows a great deal about law and things, more even than you do; though you are very, very clever, Kate dear. I wouldn't make so sure of . . . of anything, if I were you."

"Patience, patience, time will show," returned her friend a little wearily; then, after a few moments' thought, she exclaimed passionately, "You cannot know how deeply this blow has sunk into my soul! I shall never be quite the same again till I have rolled back that man's triumph on himself, and proved that I possessed—even if I did not deserve it -my husband's love and confidence to the last! After all," she went on, speaking slowly, dreamily, "my lot has been a little hard. have never known real love—love I could heartily return—now I am compelled by fortune to turn aside out of the way of it. And I do believe that not only is love the whole fulfilling of the law, but of life, too, to a woman. But," in a cheerier tone, "there are many pleasant things left-among them success and revenge; not desperate, cruel revenge, you know, but a little pinching of one's enemy, just to give salt to the success. Tell me about yourself, Fan?"

A long confidential talk ensued, for Fanny was unusually sensible and satisfying, yet she avoided her own affairs somewhat; so Mrs. Temple concluded that her engagement to Tom, if it existed, was a tacit one. It was dusk when they reached the house.

"And, Kate, how long is that horrid, skinny Miss Potter to stay?"

"Another month," said Mrs. Temple laughing. "It will take all that time to train you. She is very useful, and a good creature."

"I hate good creatures," said Fanny with a pout.

"Which shows you are not one yourself," returned Mrs. Temple, putting the latch-key in the lock. "How thankful I am that everything has turned out favourably so far, though we must not expect it to be always sunshine! What a comfort that Mills seems tolerably pleased and in good spirits—where is she, by the way?" Mrs. Temple opened the kitchendoor as she spoke, and beheld Mills seated by the fast-dying fire, her feet stretched out resting on each other, her hands clasped together,

her apron thrown over her face, a picture of hopeless affliction.

Time flew by with amazing rapidity in the busy monotony of the new life upon which Kate and Fanny had entered. To the former it was far from uninteresting. Her selfesteem was deeply pledged to its success, and she soon began, under the pressure of such a motive, to understand her work. Misunderstanding is at the root of so many dislikes; to be thoroughly known is often, to the least attractive, to possess sympathy and liking. Then it was very delightful to perceive that, as the town filled, so did her trade increase. The possession of a little ready money, too, was a great advantage at the outset, as it enabled her to renew her stock on good terms, and without any difficulty respecting references, which would have been puzzling to find. As soon as she began to ascertain the kind of goods most in demand, she felt emboldened to add sundry fancy articles to her stock of jet ornaments and trinkets-she even ventured to run up to town from Friday morning to the following evening and visit the great emporiums in Cannon Street, where, if "fancy" was not originally "bred" she has developed

to an extraordinary degree. All Pierstoffe was attracted by the dazzling array which resulted from this visit, and Mrs. Temple could not refrain from laughing at the sort of pride she detected in her own heart on finding that for some time both Fanny and herself were decidedly overworked, while the average of receipts was a trifle under fourteen pounds a week.

"What do you think of that, Tom?" wrote the widow to her faithful ally; "I have put away half the money to replace what has been sold, and the rest I shall keep in the bank, as I shall want nothing for our house or other expenditure for six months at least."

Meantime Fanny had caught the taste for business, or pretended she did, though Kate shrewdly suspected she viewed the whole undertaking as playing at shop-keeping, and could not believe that in sober earnest they were always to work.

Small troubles, of course, arose. Mrs. Mills started with a fixed and unalterable hatred to the unhappy "girl" who had been kept on by Mrs. Temple. Mills knew too well what was due to herself to hear any reason on the subject; and her mistress, though sorely tempted to give way, was determined not to yield to

an unjust prejudice, consequently "Sarah Jane's" was not a life of unbroken sunshine; some respite, however, was afforded to all parties by her returning each evening to "do" for her grandmother, and her remaining under the maternal roof till nine the following morning.

Lady Styles was another thorn in their side, though by no means an unmixed evil. Being rich and idle, she was an excellent customer, and not only bought herself, but brought many to buy; for her house was always full. Her extreme curiosity was distressing, and so alarming to poor Fanny, who had been solemnly warned by her friend against gratifying it, that her ladyship's first visits generally cost the pretty little assistant a fit of crying. Lady Styles took the deepest interest in the Berlin Bazaar and its owner, who had taken her advice respecting the credit system, to which fact her ladyship attributed the entire success, so far, of the young widow's speculation. Perhaps the true source of Lady Styles' interest lay in her unslaked curiosity. Mrs. Temple and Fanny grew quite skilled in fencing off her queries, and tacitly permitting her to form one theory after another as to their previous history. Her conjectures,

always stated with the most insolent candour, were often curiously ingenious; but the fact of Mrs. Temple having come direct from France baffled her a good deal. That there was a mystery about the fair, sedate, attentive widow, she felt quite sure, and she also felt herself bound to unravel it, if only to keep up her character. In this Dr. Slade was somewhat a hindrance. The doctor and she were old acquaintances—often partners at whist, at the various dinners to which the former, in his double character of sportsman and doctor, was frequently invited - but always more or less rivals in pursuit of the latest, the most correct, and the most startling intelligence: Dr. Slade generally mentioning Lady Styles (in safe quarters) as that "blundering old gossip, who always has the wrong end of a story;" while Lady Styles usually spoke of him as "poor dear Dr. Slade! you never can exactly depend on anything from him." Therefore, whatever theory started by her ladyship was either openly negatived by the doctor, or he shook his head with a calmly contemptuous smile, as if he knew ever so much better, only he could not speak, which, as Lady Styles remarked, would be "perfectly ridiculous if it was not maddening."

The doctor continued very friendly, and masked his batteries more skilfully than Lady Styles. He fulfilled his promise by introducing an invalid gentleman and his valet as tenants to Mrs. Temple, whose three months' occupancy of her rooms very nearly paid a whole year's rent; but this piece of good fortune was not altogether without its unpleasantness also. The "valet," a thick-set, "dour"-looking individual, unaccomplished in any of the suave graces which usually distinguish a "gentleman's gentleman," gave a good deal of trouble about his own and his master's food, and attracted so much of Mrs. Mills's wrath and indignation upon himself that she had none to spare for "Sarah Jane," and grew quite friendly towards that victim during the period of counter-irritation. tenant himself—a red-faced, grey-whiskered, short, slight man of mild aspect, well dressed in an old-fashioned style, and always wearing shoes and gaiters—developed a curious tendency to slide down the bannisters when he thought no one was looking, and to sit in his open window when all Pierstoffe was out in its best attire, with his nightcap over his hat. Whatever doubts these peculiarities might have suggested were quickly resolved into

certainty by Lady Styles on the first oppor-

tunity.

"I have just been talking to Dr. Slade, Mrs. Temple," she said, "and I told him it was a great shame to quarter a madman and his keeper on you. Yes, a madman! but immensely rich—made a fortune in one day on the Stock Exchange, and lost his senses in consequence. They say he is not dangerous; but you can never be sure. He may get up any night and murder you and this nice little creature in your sleep. His valet sleeps in his room, you say? Oh, the cunning of madness is so extraordinary! he would escape the keeper."

A suggestion which gave Mrs. Temple no small amount of trouble, as Fanny could neither control nor conceal her fears, and every night went through nearly an hour's searching in cupboards, behind curtains, and under beds before she finally locked herself into her room.

On the whole, this slightly capricious young person was of more real use than Mrs. Temple had ventured to hope, and for the first two or three months things went smoothly in the main. By that time, however, their fellow-townspeople began to evince a desire to make their acquaintance, and Mrs. Temple deter-

mined not to hold aloof from the proffered intercourse.

Among the higher class of tradespeople, none stood higher than Mr. Turner, of "Turner and Sons," the grand, and indeed only drapery emporium of Pierstoffe. He was a very honest, respectable man, understanding his own work thoroughly, but little else; for education in the "good old days" of his boyhood was held to be an unholy thing for any one below the rank of an esquire; and gentlemen thought they best served "God and the king" by heaping up barriers of difference between them and the brethren like unto themselves whom Providence, for some wise purpose, had placed upon this earth to do their bidding. education, Mr. Education or no managed to amass a good deal of money, and the more he advanced in wealth and consideration-which are indeed synonymous termsthe more he felt the want of what he himself would have termed "learning." Not that he said so, even to the wife of his bosom—he said very little on any subject—but he resolved that his son—his only son, Joseph should have all the advantages he had never known.

Now Joseph, though an only son, was not

an only child; three elder sisters alternately cuddled and cuffed him through an early boyhood of much spoiling, while two younger ones afforded ample scope for the tyranny over weaker vessels so natural to incipient man. But no only child could have been an object of fonder hopes. He was carefully instructed at the Stoneborough Grammar School; he was sent from thence to a commercial academy in the neighbourhood of London, and finally placed in a West-end establishment, to learn the higher and more elegant mysteries of business.

He was far from a dull boy. He learned something of all this, and a good deal more besides.

Mr. Turner and his family attended the little old parish church, which modern Pierstoffe had far outgrown. He was equally opposed to attending the Baptist Chapel, Salem Chapel, Little Bethel, or St. Monica's Church, a brand-new edifice erected by subscription to accommodate increasing numbers both of inhabitants and visitors (as a man of business, Mr. Turner had subscribed to it; as a man of Protestant religion, he refused to attend it), and supported by an offertory which an excellent, hard-working, lantern-

jawed, long-coated Anglican priest toiled to fill with energy and ingenuity that would have been invaluable in the purveyor to a music hall—in all respect be it written—for the Rev. Claudius St. John cared little for this world's goods, but he loved to see his church beautiful, and he heartily cared for the poor. To return: Mr. Turner attended the old parish church, and insisted on his family attending it also. Although he looked on his son as a superior, or rather a fancy article, his will was on some points law to the young man, and this was one of them; so it fell out that Mr. Joseph Turner saw Mrs. Temple and Fanny. They had also elected to sit under the rector, a mild, well-bred, indolent old gentleman, who, as the poor people used to say admiringly, "never harmed no one." In the animated discussions which ensued respecting the new people at the Berlin Bazaar, Mr. Joseph was unusually silent; and although he frequently took occasion to saunter by the Berlin establishment of an evening in an admirable, London-made, sea-side suit, and a cigarette (refinement was his forte!) in his mouth, he never met the new proprietress and her assistant save once, when they were very simply attired, and

moving briskly towards the Barmouth Road. evidently bent on a refreshing country walk. As spring advanced, a movement among the more enterprising townsfolk to water the street and roadway of the Esplanade, culminated in a meeting and a resolution to that effect, which was neatly drawn out on a sheet of foolscap, and ordered to be taken round by some one of the committee to all the principal houses to collect subscriptions. Mr. Turner, senior, as a churchwarden and a representative man, felt that he ought to be first in such an excellent work; but he by no means fancied the undertaking. He was, therefore, doubly gratified when his son volunteered his services—first, because such a mark of interest in mundane affairs was rather rare in the sullen young gentleman; secondly, because it was a personal relief. Thus it came about that just after the early dinner hour, when things were quiet one blazing afternoon in early June, Fanny peeped between the half-worked cushions and slippers, the traced screens and ornamental baskets that adorned the window, and exclaimed, "Here comes that elegant young man who stares so at us in church!—and. Kate! I protest he is coming in!"

The next moment Mr. Joseph, in unquestionable attire, was raising his hat with metropolitan grace, as he stood in the centre of the shop, Macassar in his locks, a moss-rose in his buttonhole, and a handkerchief redolent of millefleurs in his hand.

"A thousand pardons!" he said, in a mild and rather squeaky voice. "I have taken the liberty of calling in the character of a petitioner. Fact is, a number of respectable buffers belonging to this town, my governor among them, have decided on levying—a—contributions for the desirable object of laying the dust, and I have therefore to request you will come down with your dust—if you will excuse that form of address."

This speech, though carefully conned, and delivered with a certain fluency, cost the speaker no small effort. He was in a violent perspiration before it ended, and, as usual, the effort to conceal his real bashfulness, of which he was heartily ashamed, made him assume an unnecessarily brazen front. As he paused, he drew forth from a breast-pocket and presented to Mrs. Temple the foolscap aforesaid. She received it with a gracious bow and smile, proceeding to peruse it before committing herself to speech. While she did

so, Mr. Joseph addressed some remarks on the weather to Fanny, in much less an audacious tone than that in which he began. That volatile little lady, infinitely amused by the young man's air of fashion and elaborate elegance, replied with much suavity, quite running over with smiles.

"A very necessary undertaking," said Mrs. Temple, interrupting their conversation, as she finished perusing the "resolution." "I shall be most happy to contribute;" and, drawing forth her purse, she returned the paper with a smile and a half-sovereign.

"Very handsome, indeed," observed her visitor, "for a new-comer."

"But I hope to be long reckoned among the townsfolk," returned Mrs. Temple.

"If I may be considered in any way representing Pierstoffe," replied Mr. Joseph gallantly, but not without a tinge of self-importance, "I should say the town is honoured by the addition of two such ladies to its residents. Perhaps," he went on, half-jest, half-earnest, "I may one of these days be its Parliamentary representative—who knows! the age of progress, you know; a—impossible to say what it may lead to. As strangers, you may not be aware that my father's Mr.

Turner, of the Emporium, ma'am—is the oldest-established firm in the place, except Prodgers, the grocer; but then the difference of position is enormous! My governor is desperately fond of the concern, though there is really no necessity for his working it. Were the choice left to me——" A graceful flourish of his perfumed handkerchief, and the rest was left to imagination.

"Does Pierstoffe return a member to Parliament?" asked Mrs. Temple, a little puzzled how to reply, and seizing the only point of general interest in his speech.

"Not as yet," said the future M.P., lifting and re-arranging his hat on his Macassar curls. "The narrow-minded agriculturists, who absorb Parliamentary powers, have as yet ignored the growing—I may say, the fast-growing claims of this rising town. Nevertheless, the hour is coming—perhaps the man will not be wanting."

Mrs. Temple generally hoped all possible success to that mysterious individual.

Still Mr. Turner lingered. He talked of "Town" with an air of exhaustive knowledge, and strove, though not very persistently, to ascertain if they were Londoners. Fanny's knowledge of what had been going on at the

theatres six months before fixed her locale; but Mrs. Temple was impervious, and, to a point-blank inquiry, replied, as was her habit now—

"I have lived in London, but I came last from France."

This reply, coupled with an admission that her husband dealt in Eastern produce, gave rise to a generally-received theory that the late Mr. Temple had been in the grocery line, in a large way; had failed; had fled to France to escape his creditors and get brandy cheap, as he took to drink, and, after inflicting much suffering on his wife, died and left her in the direst poverty. Her friends and Miss Lee's had bought the "Berlin Bazaar" and set them up—the money was chiefly Miss Lee's. She came of a high family in some mysterious way-the natural daughter of an earl-of a marchioness—of a general officer. easy to see she was unaccustomed to business. and the most independent of the two, &c., &c.

Meantime, Mr. J. Turner, jun., as was printed on his cards, which had led to his being familiarly styled J.T.J., posed and talked till, to Mrs. Temple's relief, the entrance of some customers obliged him to retire; not, however, before he expressed a hope on the part of

the ladies of his family, which they had not authorised him to do, that on some suitable occasion they might become acquainted with Mrs. Temple and her friend.

So gradually the widow found herself drawn into social relations with her fellows. She accepted their advances with a frankness that proved her best safeguard against intrusion, as what seems within the grasp is never too eagerly sought. But the only intimacy she found was with the chemist's wife—a gentlewoman by nature, but "sair hauden doon" by a large and ever-increasing family. To her Mrs. Temple and her friend were real "Godsends;" so much help, refreshment, and courage did she glean from her kindly and congenial neighbours.

Thus the first months of their life at Pierstoffe rolled over for Kate Travers and her friend.



CHAPTER XIV.

N spite of prudence and all the other reasonable bugbears you array against me, I will run down on Saturday and see how you are

getting on," wrote Tom Reed to Mrs. Temple a week or two after the visit of Mr. Turner, described in the last chapter; for Mrs. Temple had requested that for a while he would abstain from visiting them until they had established themselves, fearing that Tom's hopelessly gentlemanlike air might afford food for scandal and conjecture. "You will be quite satisfied with my appearance. I have invested in a travelling suit of the most 'gent'-like aspect. I shall put rings on my fingers, and

would put bells on the other fingers (as the French have it), if they would facilitate matters. In short, I hope to look the character of your London agent perfectly, and expect to be welcomed literally and metaphorically with open arms."

"How delightful it will be to see him!" cried Kate after reading this aloud. "But it is almost too soon for him to come. Don't you think so, Fanny?"

"No, indeed, I do not," returned that young lady candidly, and sparkling all over with smiles. "I have rather wondered why he kept away so long—I mean after Miss Potter went;" for "Mrs. Browne's right-hand woman" had departed a considerable time before, much gratified by a small present over and above the sum agreed upon for her services, and eloquent in her good wishes for the young widow's success.

"You know I have always warned him not to come."

"But for all that," pouted Fanny, "he has been marvellously patient."

"You are an unreasonable little goose," said her friend. "However, I shall be delighted to see him. He cannot be here till late. We must have something very nice for

supper, and an extra good dinner on Sunday. I will go and speak to Mills." And Mrs. Temple rose from the breakfast table, where this conversation took place.

"I do not think Tom cares much for eating," said Fanny, with a slight sigh and a tinge of sentiment in the outlook of her bright brown eyes.

"Nonsense," returned Mrs. Temple. "There is a strong dash of the Epicurean in the dear old fellow. Depend (upon it he loves sugar and spice, and all that's nice, in his heart of hearts, though I believe he is man enough to do without anything cheerfully, if necessary." And Mrs. Temple went off quickly to consult Mills, whose countenance relaxed even towards the ex-stockbroker's gentleman when she heard she was to "kill the fatted calf" for Master Tom.

Business was quite over, and the "shutters up"—phrase suggestive of repose—when Tom arrived. The best sitting-room had been prepared; the lamp was burning soft but bright; the window, open upon the garden, let in the delicious perfume of mignonette mingled with new-mown grass, for the little plat had been carefully shaven in the afternoon, that things might look their best; the old furniture judi-

ciously arranged, with some telling additions of ornamental needlework.

"I am sure it all looks lovely," said Fanny, putting the finishing touches with trembling fingers. Both friends were in a state of joyous excitement at the prospect of Reed's visit. To Fanny it was all joy; but Kate was surprised and vexed to feel how keen and painful were the memories revived by the prospect of seeing him. Bravely as she worked and faced her destiny, she still quivered under the sense of defeat and injustice; she still burned with the desire to right herself and revenge the insults that had been heaped upon her, which were none the less bitter for being unconsciously offered.

"Listen! a carriage, or something, has stopped at the door," she exclaimed, turning gladly from her own stinging thoughts; and the next moment all their past life seemed to rush back upon them as Tom entered, in a bright purple-tinted "heather suit," with broad stripes down his trousers, and an indescribable felt hat on his head, which he speedily removed.

"My dear Tom! how delighted I am to see you!" cried Mrs. Temple, holding out both hands. "And I am not sorry," added Fanny, trying with shy coquetry not to look too happy.

"What's your delight to mine!" exclaimed Tom, clasping the widow's hands warmly, then letting them go to grasp Fanny's, and further proceeding to a hasty, ecstatic hug. "I have been the most desolate and disconsolate of bachelors since you left. Nothing but the hope of getting leave to run down to see you has kept me from going utterly to the bad. And what a jolly place you have!" sniffing the sweet air. "The perfume of the garden is heavenly; and how well you are both looking! By Jove! I fancy this is the ornamental side of shopkeeping."

"It has its uglier aspects," returned Mrs. Temple; "but we are not worn to skeletons yet."

"No?" said Tom interrogatively; then holding out his arms again to Fanny, "I should like to test the truth of that assertion."

"Ah," said Fanny, retreating, "this 'London assurance' will not do, Tom."

"Come, you must be famished," remarked the fair hostess, moving to the table.

"Nearly," said her guest; "but before pro-

ceeding to business I will secure quarters for the night. Where shall I go? I want to avoid the haunts of a bloated aristocracy, lest the arrival of so distinguished an individual might be bruited abroad."

"Oh, I am sure I do not know any hotel except the 'Marine,' and that is——"

"Far too fine," interrupted Tom; "but my cab is at the door; I'll confide in the driver. I shall return in ten minutes, and devour everything before me."

"He may say what he likes about being desolate," cried Fanny, "I never saw him look better."

"I am sure I have," returned Mrs. Temple.

"And what an absurd suit of clothes!"

It was a very joyous supper that night. Tom was in the wildest spirits. A little piece he had written for the Lesbian Theatre had been accepted, and would be, he hoped, produced in a few months.

"You see I could not refrain from coming to tell the news in person," continued Tom, settling himself at table and unfolding his napkin, while Mrs. Temple supplied him with cold lamb, and Fanny, on the other side, became the ministering angel of cucumber, mint sauce, and admirably-mixed salad. "Of course

the thing will succeed; lots of 'go' in it, sparkling dialogue (I had your repartees in my head, Fan, as I wrote), delicate sentiment (reminiscences of Mrs. Travers—I mean Temple), Attic salt, myself."

- "And a little Durham mustard, I hope," added Fanny.
 - "You small barbarian!"
- "Now, Tom, what will you have in the way of liquids?" asked his kind hostess.
- "Oh, barley wine—known to the vulgar as bitter beer," returned Tom.
- "Yes, there is some to be had here quite equal to Bass or Allsopp, though its bitterness is somewhat wasted on the obscurity of Pierstoffe. Fanny shall be your Hebe, and I will draw the cork."

So the two fair women petted and pampered their friend and champion, till, throwing himself back in his chair, he protested he could eat no more, finishing with the quotation, "And oh, if there be an Elysium on earth, it is this—it is this!"

- "Although behind a Berlin Bazaar," added Mrs. Temple laughing. "And now you have appeased the pangs of hunger, open your budget, and tell us the news."
 - "Which means tidings of the enemy. I

have not much. The chief enemy, I hear, made a capital book on the Derby."

"His star is in the ascendant at present," murmured Kate.

"And the report is," continued Tom, "that old Scrymgeour, of some great banking concern—a Liberal of the stingy order—is going to retire from the representation of Ribbleston, and Sir Hugh Galbraith is going to contest it in the Conservative interest, as the descendant of some Galbraith in the good old times who used to harry the inhabitants."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Temple thoughtfully.

"And, Tom, there are no tidings at present of poor old Gregory's son. I trust and hope he has not gone down at sea!"

"None. By the way, I met Poole—one of the witnesses, you remember—at the Derby. I am sorry to say he was with that fellow Trapes, who seemed rather flourishing than otherwise; and, just to keep him in sight, I made a small bet with him. Strange to say, I won, which I do not often, and Poole begged I would allow him to call and settle it, as he was a little short of cash. I willingly agreed, took his note, and when he did call to make further excuses, had some chat, but could get nothing out of him—in short, he has nothing

to tell, I imagine. I gave him a still longer time to pay up, warned him against the turf and turfites; he 'smiled, and then we parted.' No, by-the-bye, he first told me that Ford had cut St. Hilda's Place, had set up as a stockbroker, and was doing well."

- "And Poole, then, has no suspicion about that will?"
- "None, I should say. He seemed uncomfortable and shaky, but I think that is owing to his pursuits, poor devil!"
- "I wish——" began Mrs. Temple; but her wish was cut short by a mysterious pounding overhead.
 - "What the deuce is that?" asked Tom.
- "Oh, it is only our tenant," said Fanny laughing, "going to bed; we always hear that sort of noise about this hour, whenever we sit in this room. I fancy he performs an Ojibbeway war-dance round his bedstead before turning in."
 - "Is he a madman?"
- "Something very like it," said Mrs. Temple. "He will not be here much longer; and, alas! for the lowness of my motives, he pays well."
 - "That is consolatory, at all events," said

Tom. "A propos of pay, let me have a look at the accounts you write about, Mrs.—a—Temple. I am always afraid to believe they are as flourishing as you describe. Ladies are not always able to see their way through figures. Now I am a tolerable accountant."

"You used always to be in trouble over the multiplication table, Tom, I remember quite well," said Fanny.

"That is invented for the occasion," he returned.

"Yes, Tom," said Mrs. Temple, "I should be glad if you would look through my books. I do not think I have many bad debts;" and she went to fetch them.

Tom's head was very near Fanny's when she re-entered, and the former, to cover any awkwardness, immediately exclaimed, "I have just been consulting Fan whether we might not get a trap of some kind to-morrow, and make an excursion into the 'picturesque vicinity,' of which the Pierstoffe Guide speaks."

"It would be perfectly delightful!" cried Fanny.

"It would indeed," echoed Mrs. Temple. "I dare say you can get some sort of convey-

ance at your hotel. Where are you putting up, Tom?"

"Oh, at the 'Shakespeare,' the favourite house, I imagine, from its general aspect, of those knights errant of modern life, commercial travellers, who issue forth armed caparity with Punch and Bradshaw to uphold the firms they represent against all comers. Alas! what a change, Tomkins and Co.'s genuine articles, instead of the peerless Isabella or Sophonisba. Nevertheless, I dare say a trap and horse are to be found there. Now for the books."

The examination proved more satisfactory than the chief counsellor anticipated. "Upon my soul, this is magnificent!" he exclaimed. "I never thought you would turn out such a first-rate woman of business, Mrs. Travers. Your books are so beautifully clean, too! where did you learn book-keeping?"

"Some hints from Miss Potter put me in the way, and a keen sense of my own interest kept me there," she replied. "You know I always had a taste for business. Had matters not gone wrong, I should have liked to keep up and extend the old house of Travers. Heigho! there is no use in thinking of that now."

- "Not a bit," said Tom; "let us return to the books. I really believe you will do a very good business here."
- "Yes, just now; but you must remember this is the very height of our season. The autumn and dreary winter are yet to come."
- "True," returned Tom. "Could you not add something useful to your stock? I confess it amazes me to see such a lot of money paid for things that everyone could do perfectly well without."
- "It is surprising," said the widow quietly.

 "But your suggestion is good. I shall think about it, Tom."
- "And Mr. Ford has left the 'house' and turned stockbroker?" said Mrs. Temple, as Tom Reed rose to say good-night. "Did he quarrel with Sir Hugh Galbraith?"
- "I do not know. Galbraith, it seems, has scarcely ever shown at St. Hilda's Place, and the concern is being wound up."
 - "Indeed! Do you ever see Mr. Ford?"
- "Never. He is out of my way, and I never liked him. I do not know why, except that I always fancied him a bit of a sneak."
- "I do not think that," said Mrs. Temple thoughtfully. "I think his spirit was always

willing, but his flesh was weak. There was a want of pluck—I can find no other word—in him, which I imagine always put him at odds with himself; for his impulses were very good."

"Perhaps so," returned Tom carelessly.

"By the way I forwarded you a letter from Wall about a month ago, and was in hopes it might contain some good news; but as you said nothing, my hopes died away."

"I remember. It only contained a repetition of Sir Hugh Galbraith's offer; and enclosed a letter from the wife of our clergyman at Hereford Square. She was the only one of my neighbours there with whom I contracted any intimacy; and although I lost sight of her when we went to Hampton Court, she very kindly wrote, on hearing of the great wrong that had been done me, asking my plans—and if she could in any way serve me. It is the only offer of the kind I have received; few women have ever stood more alone than I do."

"You are a host in yourself," said Tom cheerfully. "But in spite of the flourishing aspect of your affairs at present, I wish you had accepted the baronet's offer—certainty is

certain—and this concern does not belong to the category."

"On this head silence, dear Tom! even from good words."

The next morning was an ideal summer's day, tempered by a delicious breeze. "I feel like a real tradeswoman going out for a Sunday jaunt," said Fanny, as Tom Reed was assisting her into a very presentable pony phaeton, which looked rather small for the steady Roman-nosed steed attached to it.

"I hope you are not a sham one!" retorted Mrs. Temple, laughing. "This is very enjoyable," she continued, as they bowled along at a better pace than the "Roman" seemed to promise. "I hope you have studied a map of the country, for Fan and I are quite unable to direct you; our expeditions have been limited to walking distance."

"Oh, yes. I have informed myself. In fact, after I left you last night, I improved my opportunities by cultivating one of the knights errant of whom we were speaking; and he was good enough to introduce me to the commercial room, for I assure you the men of the road are exceedingly exclusive. They gave me lots of information as to the surround-

ing country, and were exceedingly pleasant fellows—fanciful, perhaps, in the distribution of their 'h's,' but emphatically men of the world. I picked up some ideas from them, I can assure you. There was one curious specimen of an ambitious son of trade there, a Radical, a poet—an awful ass—and he was properly chaffed. I fancy he was a Pierstoffean."

"It must have been Turner junior," said Fanny aside to Kate.

"What! do you know any of the aborigines?" asked Tom overhearing.

"Yes; we know several of our neighbours," replied Mrs. Temple. "It would never do to hold aloof, as if we were made of different stuff, which we are not. It is foolish, and yet so easy to make enemies. You remember the Italian proverb: 'Hast thou fifty friends, 'tis not enough; hast thou one enemy, 'tis too much."

"Do you know, Mrs. Trav—Temple, I mean—I am lost in admiration of your common sense!" exclaimed Tom. "Though why we should call that common which is the rarest of gifts I do not know."

"Because it is chiefly exercised in everyday matters, perhaps," said she.

- "You see, mine is the uncommon sense," put in Fanny. "So I am a much higher sort of creature than either of you. Instead of stumbling along the ground over all sorts of reasonable impediments, I soar right away to conclusions, which, I am quite sure, time will prove to be correct."
 - "For instance?" asked Mrs. Temple.
- "You and Tom blind and deafen yourselves to your own dislike of him, because he has always behaved well and been obliging, and it is unreasonable to doubt him. I don't care for reason. I do not like him! I never did. I am certain he is a tiresome, conceited, spiteful creature; and you will find him out to be a villain of the deepest dye!"
- "Oh, Fanny, Fanny!" cried Mrs. Temple and Tom together, laughing.
- "And there is Dr. Slade! I don't like him. I can't tell why, but I am quite sure I am right—he is a tyrannical old humbug."
- "Do not let us abuse people this delicious evening," said Mrs. Temple; and then the conversation turned on Tom Reed's concerns, his hopes and prospects, while the three friends deeply enjoyed the fragrant fields and shady lanes through which their road led to

· the ruined Priory mentioned in the description of Pierstoffe which Tom had read aloud in the dingy London lodging.

Here a gaping boy was easily induced to watch the little carriage and the horse, while the trio rambled about the ruins, and drank in the still beauty of the place, the atmosphere, the sunset views, with delighted eyes.

"Tell me," said Tom, as they neared the town on their way back, addressing Mrs. Temple in confidential tones, "are you really happy? You look well, but there is something in your eyes, your expression, that used not to be there."

"You are a keen observer," she returned, smiling. "Yes, I am happy just now; but a feeling of weariness and dissatisfaction sometimes creeps over me. I know I cannot go on always living as I do now; I want a wider range. I often feel a wild wish to be in the thick of the world, not shunted into a corner as I am. But I can wait. I am young; I want to make some money, and I have an innate conviction, quite unreasoning enough to please Fanny, that there is a change coming."

"Why do you not write?" asked Tom.
"There is more in that pretty, stately head of yours, I believe, than in half our women

writers. Why don't you go in for a thrilling tale? I am sure you have diablerie enough to invent one."

"Thank you, no; I am afraid I have nothing to say the public would like to hear; so I shall reserve myself for the battle of Armageddon which is before me."

"I wish you would put that out of your head! a haunting, unhealthy dream like this will spoil your nature and your life."

"I cannot help it, Tom; I cannot," said Mrs. Temple, earnestly. "Life will be one long defeat, if I cannot upset that will."

These words brought them to the door, and Tom checked his desire to press the subject farther.

"It is a lovely night!" he exclaimed, for the sun had gone down half an hour before. "As soon as I leave the trap at the stables, I will return, and perhaps you will take a stroll along the beach with me, Fanny?"

"Yes—if Kate will come, too," said Fanny, with sudden shyness.

"Nonsense!" returned Mrs. Temple, laughing. "I think you may venture on a walk without my chaperonage."

When the cousins had departed on their stroll, and she had assisted Mills to prepare

supper, Mrs. Temple sat down by her bedroom window to watch the glimmering moonlight growing more distinct as the last tints of the sunset died out, and listen to the soft, sleepy ripple of the advancing tide. book she had taken up dropped upon her knee, and her thoughts flew away. Was she happy? No; she had not been for many a long day; not since the old free days of poverty and light-heartedness at Cullingford. Her husband-well, she thought of him tenderly, gratefully; but she would have been sorry to live the repressed life she had led with him over again. Wealth had only been a hindrance to her; yet the loss of it, and all that it entailed, had been a bitter blow. knew all the longing for a full, active, loving life that heaved and struggled unspoken in her heart; she knew the deep capacity for enjoyment, the thirst for knowledge, the desire to go out into the world and possess it through a full understanding of its varieties, that lay under the well-controlled surface of her life.

"I must break away from this routine sometime, but for the present I must be patient, and for the present I have done the best I could. Where, where shall I see the first glimmer of light to guide me out of the

puzzling darkness of the present. Tom is right; this dream of mine, if unfulfilled, will spoil my life. Yet I cannot, will not give it up. But can those be Tom and Fanny coming back already?"

It was that happy couple; and no sooner had Mrs. Temple lit the lamp and looked upon them than she saw something was wrong.

"Had you a nice walk?" asked Kate.

"Oh, very!" replied Fanny in a peculiar tone.

"Perhaps you thought so; I didn't!" said Tom savagely.

"What has happened?" asked the widow.

"Why," exclaimed Tom, getting up and walking over to Mrs. Temple, "who do you think joined us? That unmitigated idiot who made such an ass of himself last night with those bagmen. He talked to Fanny as if he had known her all his life! And she encouraged him, and laughed and talked nonsense till he did not know whether he was on his head or his heels. I did my best to stop her——"

"You did," said Fanny; "you pinched my arm black and blue!"

"But it was no use! It is too bad that

either of you should be obliged to hold any communication with such an insufferable snob! but that Fanny should encourage him to stay and spoil our walk was, to say the least, extremely bad taste!"

"How can you be so cross and disagreeable, Tom? I could not help it, Kate. It was so funny to hear him patronizing Tom, asking him if he knew this place, and that theatre, and Tom sternly denying all knowledge of everything, till Turner junior evidently thought he was a mere hard-working drone, utterly inexperienced in life! I know you would have been amused."

"Very well," said Tom, controlling himself, and sitting down to supper with a very bad grace, "I see you are fonder of fun than your friends, or your friend! I used to flatter myself that I was your friend par excellence; but if all is fish that comes to your net, provided they make you laugh, I do not care to be included in the haul!"

"Don't be so stupid and serious," cried Fanny, enjoying to the full the sense of power of which Tom's ill temper gave her a glimpse. "I haven't you always, and I can't afford to quarrel with Mr. Turner, for he is constantly here; so be a good boy, and make friends."

But Tom was not to be pacified, though Fanny made some pretty little advances; still she held her ground gallantly. It was so delightful to be able to shake the airy composure she had so often admired in those days when her cousin appeared to her a mighty and irresistible swell.

So Tom's delightful visit ended less brightly than it began. Overnight he declared he would leave by an early train before Pierstoffe had opened its eyes; but he, nevertheless, appeared at breakfast, and bid Mrs. Temple a tender [adieu, contenting himself with shaking Fanny's hand coldly, and never once asked for a kiss!



CHAPTER XV.

HIS little quarrel took some time and trouble to heal. After holding out saucily and defiantly for a while, even with her dear friend and con-

fidant, Fanny suddenly burst into tears as she was bidding her good-night, and declared herself themost miserable, stupid, good-for-nothing girl on the face of the earth, but nevertheless that Tom was equally worthless and much more ill-natured! still, undeserving though he might be, she would break her heart if he did not make it up. But Kate was on no account to mention this in her letters, yet she was to write so as to convince the culprit of the havoc he was making of her (Fanny's) happiness—

and Mrs. Temple might also hint that the obnoxious Turner had been as nearly cut as circumstances would admit. But the affair was not finally arranged until Tom paid them a flying and unexpected visit—when, being taken unawares, Fanny gave him such a warm reception that all doubts and difficulties disappeared.

A long monotonous stretch of time ensued. The season which had been both long and good wore itself away. The excitable tenant and his moody man departed, leaving however a blessing behind as regarded Mrs. Mills' disposition towards "the gurl." slight excitement was created by the addition of a few more useful articles, such as gloves, warm ties, and hosiery, to the widow's stock, in accordance with Tom's suggestion, but by the end of October the last visitor of summer had departed. Lady Styles had returned after a brief visit to Vichy, and all things had settled down to the dead level of winter. Mrs. Temple's receipts showed the difference between in and out of season custom very distinctly; but against this must be balanced the diminished outlay, as she did not require to renew her stock, and steadily worked off what remained on hand. Still she was able

to make a considerable addition to her deposit account at the Branch, which the "Stoneborough and Shire Bank" had found it worth while to establish at Pierstoffe.

This blank period was broken agreeably by Christmas, when they were again enlivened by a few days of Tom's society. But he could not stay long. The editor of the *Morning Thresher* had been ailing for some time and was now worse, so Tom had to work double tides. Nevertheless he was in excellent spirits, and even exchanged a polite greeting in the market-place with the disconsolate Joseph, who had been deeply smitten with Fanny, and took her coldness very much to heart.

So the months rolled away; a year had almost gone since the gloomy March morning when Mr. Ford had disclosed his evil tidings, and still no ray of light had penetrated the mystery of Mr. Travers' will. His widow was feeling unusually restless and rebellious, it seemed so hard to work thus for mere existence! In vain she told herself that many toiled harder for a poorer return, still she could not silence the question that arose perpetually, "Is it to be always thus?" Perhaps a doubt sometimes crossed her that she

had done what was best for her heart and mind when she turned her back upon "that station in life" to which she had been originally called. If so, she fought gallantly against such looking back; well knowing that a thought once crystallised into words becomes much more tangible and irresistible, she never permitted a syllable even in her most confidential moments to pass her lips that could impart her feelings to Fanny, and resolutely checked poor Mills' constant lamentations over the misfortunes and downfall which had overtaken them.

Such a mood was strong upon the young widow one morning towards the middle of February, as she forced herself to eat her breakfast somewhat against the grain.

- "Did you sleep, dear?" asked Fanny, whose loving eyes were not to be deceived as to her friend's aspect. "You look quite weary."
- "Not very well," she replied; "I had tiresome dreams."
- "So had I," said Fanny gravely. "I dreamed that I was trying to put that piece of work we had from Miss Monitor right, where the mistake is in the border; and a little black crow hopped up to me and began unpicking the stitches with his beak; I didn't

mind a bit, it seemed quite natural at first, but after a while I said, 'Isn't this very odd?' when he looked up and I saw he was exactly like Doctor Slade! Was it not funny? A crow is not lucky but a man is, so I shouldn't be surprised if we had some——"

"A letter for you'm," said Mills coming in, in her beautifully white cap and apron, "enough," as Tom Reed said, "to cast a halo of aristocracy even over a Berlin wool establishment."

"It's the crow," cried Fanny; "do pray open it, Kate."

She did so, and as she read her colour rose, her large eyes brightened.

"Well?" exclaimed Fanny, interrogatively.

"Well, dearest Fan, he has arrived," said Mrs. Temple eagerly.

"Who has arrived?"

"Captain Gregory, son of the old man who drew the will—the real will! At last I shall get some clue."

"Oh!" said Fanny; "it would be charming

to upset that will!"

"I am afraid that is a long way off," returned Mrs. Temple. "Mrs. Bell writes, 'I hasten to inform you, according to promise, that we were joyfully surprised the day

before yesterday by the unexpected return of my dear brother. Illness has been the cause of his long absence, as he was obliged to let his ship go away from Bangkok to New York without him; he wrote home, but the letter never reached. He is still very weak, and of course I have not spoken to him respecting your affairs, dear madam, nor should I do so unless you wish; but I hasten to let you know of his return, and will do whatever you desire in the way of speaking to him. I am happy to say this leaves me and mine quite well, I trust and hope foreign parts agree with you. I beg to express my best wishes, and remain your grateful and obedient servant,-Maria Bell.'

"What shall I do, Fanny?" asked Mrs. Temple, not with the slightest hope of receiving any suggestion.

"I am sure I don't know."

"I can't go up and see him, I am afraid of encountering anyone. I cannot have him down here, for they must not know I am in England! I will ask Tom to see him; and Tom is so convinced that I am under a delusion, he will not examine him properly."

"I am sure he will! What does he say?"

"Oh! nothing-merely a line! he is des-

perately busy — there, read it," and Mrs. Temple tossed the note across to Fanny.

To write most passionately, urging Tom to act in this matter as if he were, like herself, convinced that poor Travers's last found will was a forgery; to entreat his careful avoidance of Wall, Ford, every one—and to enjoin him to study well what manner of man the returned sailor was—was Mrs. Temple's first task that morning, and enclosing Mrs. Bell's letter she posted her despatch in time for the first mail to London.

The next morning brought a few hasty but cordial lines in reply. Tom Reed undertook to do her bidding in the heartiest good faith. "And as to the opposite party, the arch enemy is out of the way. I heard yesterday at the Reform Club that the election scheme went off, for old Scrymgeor recovered. Sir H. G. went over to some of the German gambling places, and is wintering in the Pyrenees." Tom ended by warning his correspondent that he could not see Gregory for a day or two, but within a week she should certainly have news.

The interval which elapsed was a severe trial. If this man was stupid or sulky, or possessed by that not uncommon English determination, not to meddle with what did not concern him, his information would not be available—then, very possibly he had no information whatever; in this case her last state would be more hopeless than the first. Time dragged very heavily to the young widow; in vain she strove to divert her thoughts from the all-absorbing subject; post hours made her heart beat to suffocation, and ages seemed to have passed since Mrs. Bell's letter had reached her; even in her heart she said, "There is no earnestness or energy in Tom"—Tom, the faithful and unwearied!—but she dared not utter it aloud.

The Saturday following this disturbing announcement was a mild, heavy day—fog banks lay up the sea, and a slight mist drove from time to time across the tops of the highest cliffs. Day-light had not yet quite faded, and Mrs. Temple was somewhat surprised by a visit from Lady Styles.

"Rather late, eh!" said her ladyship. "I have been all the way over to the Grange, and the tiresome people were away in London; what can they want in London in February? when the father is not in the house! So I stopped to bait the horses, and now I want some gloves and filoselle—I dare say you don't know what filoselle is?"

"Yes I do, Lady Styles," returned Mrs. Temple, laughing, "and what is more—I have it."

"I protest you are the most enlightened woman in Pierstoffe," cried Lady Styles, and then proceeded to turn over every article on the counter while Fanny sought for and produced the desired filoselle. "And now tell me," proceeded her ladyship, settling herself on one chair and placing her feet on the bar of another, "how are you getting on?" This was always the prelude to a long chapter of gossip, so poor Kate resigned herself, though feeling unusually bored and absent, while Fanny affected to employ herself in re-arranging all that Lady Styles had disturbed, not liking to desert her friend and partner, or leave her alone in the clutches of the grand inquisitor.

Meantime Mrs. Mills having scolded the "gurl" through the operation of "washing up and putting away" after the early dinner—not scolded in any anger, but in her ordinary tone, merely for the "gurl's" benefit—sat down to plait a cap-border; but, as the light faded, which it did sooner at the back than the front of the house, she laid aside her work and, calling to the well-trained Sarah to

put on the kettle, began to set out the teacups, cheering up at the prospect of her favourite beverage. Suddenly the silence was broken by an imperative ring of the front-door bell. "Now who can that be?" said Mrs. Mills, for it was loud enough to reach her dulled ear. She paused—the tea-caddy open in one hand, a broad, stumpy spoon in the other—"Who can that be?" repeated Mrs. Mills, not without a tinge of indignation in her tone.

"Shall I answer the door, mum?" asked the "gurl."

"Certainly not!" said Mrs. Mills with much dignity; and, laying down the tea-caddy, "not while the strength is left me, will I let a chit like you answer my missus's street door!"—A second loud peal.

"Bless us! what a hurry they are in," exclaimed Mills, hastening "to the front."

Opening the door she beheld a gentleman with a railway rug over his shoulder, and a black bag in his hand—Mills' face brightened. "Why, Master Tom—I mean Mr. Reed! is that you?"

"My own self and no other! How is every one?"

"Step in, sir! the ladies will be delighted to see you—" closing the street door and

opening that leading into what the household termed the "shop parlour." Sit down by the fire a minute, sir; the evenings here are chilly and raw. I will call Miss Fanny directly."

"And how do you find yourself, Mrs. Mills?" asked Tom as he deposited his bag and rug on a chair and approached the fire, raising his voice, but not to the proper pitch, for Mills replied—

"Just the same as ever, sir—as flighty and teasing! yet, if a body ails a bit, that kind good——!"

"But yourself, Mrs. Mills," repeated Tom still louder; "how goes it with yourself?"

"Bless your heart, sir! I'm that stiff with rheumatics, and that heart-broken, it's a wonder I am alive! Look there, sir!" lifting a corner of the muslin blind so that the visitor might see the interior of the shop, "that's enough to curl the blood in one's veins! Oh, the ups and downs I have seen! Well, no matter—you'll have a chop to your tea, sir?"

"Oh, anything, anything," said Tom.

"And, I say, Mrs. Mills, couldn't you contrive to call Miss Lee? She does not seem to be doing anything in particular."

"I'll try, sir," she returned; and going to 20-2

the door leading into the shop, opened it gently a few inches, and waited a moment to catch Fanny's eye, this accomplished, she performed a mysterious mixed movement consisting of a nod and an upward-beckoning wave of the head. The apparition of Mills rather startled Fanny, who followed her immediately exclaiming, "What is the matter?——Oh Tom! I am so glad to see you. I am sure you have brought some good news."

"I am not so sure of that. Are you really glad to see me, my darling?" glancing quickly round to see if Mills had gone, but she had not.

"I will just get tea ready," said she, and slowly retreated.

A moment after Fanny exclaimed, "There, that is enough! not one more!—Come and sit down by the fire; you feel quite damp.—And have you seen this sailor man?"

"I have; but I reserve my tidings for your worthy principal, as old Ford used to say. How well you are looking, Fan!—insultingly well! No signs of pining for the absent one!—have you found consolation in any other ambitious shop-boy?"

"You are an illnatured thing! You know very well I never forget—but where is the good of crying and spoiling oneself about what can't be helped?"

"True! Still you could not look brighter if you were installed as commander-in-chief of myself and my not over-brilliant fortunes!"

"Ah, Tom!" returned Fanny, giving him her hand with a frank, sweet smile; "you little know how bright I could look." The entrance of Mills with the tea-tray prevented a suitable acknowledgment of this gracious speech.

"And how goes on the business?" asked Tom rather absently, his keen black eyes fastened upon his cousin's face.

"Admirably, considering the season," she returned, jumping up to assist Mills in laying the cloth. "Oh Tom, it is quite wonderful the way Kate manages. You cannot think what queer things people come and ask for; and I believe if anyone was to ask Kate for the—the—oh! the Lord Chancellor's wig, she would say, with her air of grave attention, 'We don't generally keep it in stock, but I have no doubt I could procure it for you!"—Peeping under the blind, "How long Lady Styles is staying! I must not attempt to call Kate away or I shall have to stay in her place, and Lady Styles would get everything out of me in two minutes."

- "Lady Styles be— whipt!" ejaculated Tom.
- "Don't be profane. Mills, have you no shrimps? A Pierstoffe tea without shrimps is a—what do you call it, Tom?"
 - "I am sure I don't know."
- "Yes, sure!—but I haven't two pair of arms! I can't fetch everything at once, can I?" quoth Mills.
- "No, certainly not," returned Fanny soothingly. "Will you go——" but where was never added, for again the door-bell rang furiously, hysterically.
- "That bell is gone mad," cried Mills, hurrying to answer it.
- "Something has happened," said Fanny, drawing a little nearer her cousin.
- "Perhaps it's a runaway," replied Tom, taking her hand.

Both listened, for voices could be heard without; and then Mills opening the room-door and speaking to some one outside, said: "You had better come in—for I can't make out a word you say."

Whereupon Dr. Slade entered hastily, his top-boots and garments much splashed with mud, his shirt-frill disordered — a hunting whip in one hand, his hat in the other.

"Pray don't be startled!" he began; "I have ridden on to announce that there has been a bad accident in the hunting-field just now quite close to this. I was fortunately on the spot, and have directed the sufferer to be brought here. It is nearer than the hotel, which is of importance, besides—but," interrupting himself, "where is Mrs. Temple? I must see her!"

"Oh dear! she is in the shop! I will call her. Is he very much hurt? What shall we do?" cried Fanny, clasping her hands.

"Just call Mrs. Temple like a good girl," said the Doctor impatiently; and Fanny, forgetting her terror of Lady Styles, hastily summoned the mistress of the house, who came looking much surprised to see Tom and Dr. Slade, who immediately and hurriedly explained the cause of his visit.

"It is of the utmost importance that the poor man should be placed in bed as soon as possible. He is evidently suffering from concussion of the brain, and there is nothing to be done but to keep him quiet. I rather think his arm is broken also! I immediately thought of your house, and my promise to give you a lift! now this gentleman is a

person of condition, and will not be an unprofitable inmate."

"You are very good, Dr. Slade," said Mrs. Temple somewhat uneasily. "But unless you think it would be injurious for this poor gentleman to be carried further, I would rather not have him. It will be not only great trouble, but great anxiety, and I do not want any inmate——"

"Pooh, nonsense," returned the Doctor sharply; "it will be a very good thing for you, and he will be all right in a few days. If—and all depends upon this—if he can at once be placed in quiet and comfort—come, there is not any time to lose. I will assist you to prepare all that is necessary. Have you any one you can send with a note to my surgery?" and Dr. Slade went hastily out of the room followed by Mrs. Temple, who merely gave herself time to say, "I am so delighted to see you, Tom; you have some news for me. Isn't this a terrible business?"

"I must go too," added Fanny, with a scared look. "I may be some help," and she too disappeared, but as quickly returned, carrying a plate surmounted by a bright tin cover, and evidently hot as she held it with a napkin; the other hand bore a picturesque

brown jug, over the rim of which a delicate creamy foam just peeped.

"I do not see why you should be starved because another man is half killed," said she, placing both upon the table; "pray eat it all up while we are busy. I think the beer is nice, but if you would rather have tea, the tea-pot is there on the hob, and there are shrimps and things. Oh! I must run away, this is a terrible upset! I wonder why that old Doctor insists on bringing the poor man here."

"Fanny!" cried Tom, "you are the most thoughtful little angel in creation; come back as soon as ever you can."

Fanny found the Doctor, Mrs. Temple and Mills assembled in the principal bed-room—it was fortunately unoccupied—and all very busily employed. The Doctor was scribbling some lines in pencil upon a scrap of paper, using the mantel-shelf for a desk.

"There," he exclaimed, as Fanny entered; "will you get that taken round to my surgery at once, my dear; and tell the messenger to wait for an answer?"

"Send Sarah," said Mrs. Temple, who was putting the dressing-table in order, while Mills was disentangling herself from

a pile of sheets and towels she had just brought in.

"An iron bedstead and no curtains—all right," observed the Doctor looking round; "but you have another mattress?—haven't you?"

"Oh yes, two; but they are on other beds to be kept aired."

"Right again," said the Doctor, "get them as quickly as you can—and have plenty of hot water at hand," &c., &c.

All worked with a will—but things were scarcely arranged when voices outside, and the trampling of men and horses announced the arrival of the sufferer.

"I wish your room had been on the groundfloor, for he is a heavy man," said the Doctor, hurrying downstairs to direct the conveyance of his patient.

Fanny immediately ran away and hid herself in the dim recesses of the sitting-room. Mrs. Temple, feeling very tremulous, nearly followed her example, but stopped just inside the door. Mills lit the lamp on the stairs and stood at the top, ready to obey the Doctor's behests; she was a stout-hearted capable old body, whenever she was roused beyond the influence of crotchets and tempers.

Then Mrs. Temple heard the Doctor issuing directions in short sharp snaps, heard the tramp as of several men slowly ascending, with here and there a stumble that made her heart first stop and next beat painfully.

"Steady," said the Doctor, "don't be in a hurry!—Keep him as level as you can, a few steps more and you are up—the second door on the left."

As they passed she ventured to peep forth, and with a sickening sensation of awe and pity, saw what seemed the dead body of a man extended on something, a ghastly pale face streaked with clay and blood, a torn mud-stained red coat and splashed boots; she felt very faint for a moment, but stood her ground till she saw the men who had carried up the body—would it ever come to life again?—return and go down to the hall, except one, who seemed to be a groom, and had supported the head of the sufferer.

- "Have they all gone away?" asked Fanny in a horrified little whisper out of some corner.
- "Yes, I think we may go too—stay, here is Mills. Well, Mills?"
- "They've got most of his clothes off, ma'am—and laid him down. He is shook to pieces,

poor fellow. I'm just going for hot water and flannels, and to see if Sarah has come back."

"I will run and fetch them to the door," cried Fanny, coming out of her corner; "it will save you going up and down stairs, and I can shut my eyes when you open the door."

"Thank you kindly, Miss Fanny."

"Oh, Mills," said Mrs. Temple, who looked very white, "how awful he looked! do you think he is dead?"

"The Doctor says he is not, ma'am; but I am sure I don't know."

Meantime Tom thought the best return he could make for Fanny's kind attention was to eat the chop she had provided. He accordingly sat down, cut a slice from a fresh crusty tempting loaf, and lifting the cover, proceeded to discuss a couple of chops cooked to an almost poetical pitch of perfection. He had not sat thus more than a few moments when a tap on the door leading into the shop attracted his attention.

"Come in," said Tom, pausing with a morsel of mutton uplifted on his fork.

The door opened gently, and a stout lady richly dressed in velvet and furs stepped in, not without some difficulty. "Excuse me, but could I speak for one moment—just one—to Mrs. Temple?"

"Mrs. Temple," said Tom, rising politely, "has just been called away to attend to a gentleman who has broken his back, or his leg—or his arm, or all——"

"I heard the young person who assists say something of this," returned Lady Styles, coming still further into the room; "and as I know most of the gentlemen about here, I thought I would just ascertain which of them had been injured. Pray do not let me disturb you! pray go on with your tea."

"Well, I will then, as you permit me, for I have just had a long journey."

He placed a chair for his visitor, and reseated himself. Lady Styles' eyes sparkled; here was an opportunity.

"The man they buy their wools and things from, no doubt," she thought. "What's this they call them—'Bagmen — Travellers?'—Quite right," she said aloud, "go on, don't mind me."

"Might I offer you some refreshment—Mrs.——?" resumed Tom, hesitating for her name, and peeping into the jug.

"Lady Styles, I am Lady Styles."

"Well! perhaps your ladyship would have

a glass of beer or a cup of tea? there's some been brewing this half-hour."

"He means to be monstrous civil," said Lady Styles to herself; "he is really a goodlooking young man. I will sit down with him, people are always communicative when they are eating, and he may tell me a great deal!"

While she reflected thus, Tom had taken the tea-pot from the hob.

"Well, really," said she aloud, "a cup of tea is tempting, and it is just the hour when I always have one;" so saying she sat down, drew off her gloves, and threw back her bonnet-strings, while Tom resumed his chop.

"I don't presume to pour out," he remarked; "that is a lady's office."

"Oh, I can help myself," she returned. "And do you often come down here?"

"Not half often enough," replied Tom.

"Just according to the seasons," said Lady Styles; while she made a mental note—"In love with one or the other of them."

"Exactly. Bread, Lady Styles?—and if you are of an industrious turn, let me recommend the shrimps; for securing the largest amount of occupation and the smallest return of enjoyment there is nothing like shrimps!"

"Thank you, I am very fond of shrimps!

So you don't require to come round often? there is not that change and variety in your business, there is in other branches—millinery and drapery for instance?"

- "I don't know," said Tom, smiling, and perceiving her mistake. "There is a good deal of 'dressing up' in my line."
 - "Indeed! Costumes, eh?"
- "The British public," returned Tom, "so the critics say, have ceased to care for a plain unvarnished tale."
 - "Ah, I see! Periodicals and newspapers."
 - "Precisely," said Tom Reed.
- "I suppose you have only known Mrs. Temple since she was in business?"
 - "Since she was in business," echoed Tom.
- "She is such a nice lady-like creature, I have always wondered to see her behind a counter," continued Lady Styles.
 - "Extraordinary," said Tom.
- "I suppose," resumed Lady Styles, pausing as she picked a shrimp, "I suppose there is the usual story of speculation and failure, and all that—but do you know the gossips here—it's a terribly gossiping place—say that her husband is still alive, and undergoing penal servitude for forgery and all sorts of crimes?"
 - "I assure you the late Mr. T. is as defunct

as the shrimp that now occupies your ladyship's fingers!"

"Then you knew her in her husband's lifetime, eh?"

"Good heavens!" cried Tom, "what a cross-examining counsel you would have made! There was legal acumen in the way you pounced upon that inference."

Lady Styles, by no means insensible to flattery, laughed good humouredly.

"Experience of life, my dear sir. Well, I take a deep interest in the charming widow. I fancy she reminds me of——"

But her ladyship's reminiscence was cut short by the entrance of Mrs. Temple, followed in a few minutes by Fanny.

- "Tom!" exclaimed the young widow, and stopped abruptly seeing Lady Styles, and then addressed her.
- "I ought to apologise for having left you so abruptly, but a sad accident has just occurred——"
- "So I hear," interrupted Lady Styles. "Pray who is the gentleman?"
- "That I cannot tell you; Dr. Slade is with him now, and when he comes down I will ask him. Did you want me, Lady Styles?"
 - "Not particularly; I wished to hear who

this unfortunate man is. But I assure you your friend here has done the honours in your absence remarkably well; better tea, bread and butter, and shrimps I have never tasted."

"You are very good to say so. I imagine from a remark of Dr. Slade's that the gentleman is one of the party that has occupied Hurst Lodge this winter."

"Indeed!" cried Lady Styles; "I am told they are a sad racketty set! I would get rid of him as soon as I could if I were you, or you will have the whole lot in and out, smoking and heaven knows what!"

"I rather think not," said Mrs. Temple, quietly.

"It is certainly a long rough way to take him back," continued Lady Styles, "and much more convenient for Dr. Slade to have him close by, than all that distance. Here is the Doctor."

As that gentleman entered, looking exceedingly brisk though by no means in apple-pie order—"How is he now?" chorussed every one.

"Still quite insensible," said the Doctor cheerfully. "It was rather a curious acci-

dent; the first run was very severe, but short, and——"

"But who is it, Doctor? I have waited this hour to hear," interrupted Lady Styles impatiently.

"Oh! a gentleman of position and property. Our friend Mrs. Temple here may be quite sure of her rent; he is—Sir Hugh Galbraith!"



CHAPTER XVI.

PANIR HUGH GALBRAITH."

This announcement sent a sort of electric shock through three of Dr. Slade's hearers. Mrs. Temple

started, visibly—to Tom Reed—and her cheeks flushed, but she instantly recovered her composure. Fanny uttered a prolonged "Oh!" which Tom Reed covered by a fit of coughing, and Lady Styles exclaimed with great animation, "You do not say so, Doctor!" Then, turning to Kate, continued, "A most disagreeable man, my dear! refuses all invitations! would not dine with me. And we all know that if a man rejects respectable society it is because he prefers disreputable

people. You must make him well as soon as you can, Doctor, and send him off."

"I certainly shall," returned the Doctor; "but it may be a tedious affair; however, there are, I think, no internal injuries, and I have known men recover perfectly after lying insensible for forty-eight hours, or more." Looking very keenly at Tom Reed while he spoke.

"I trust it will not be a very bad case," said Tom, answering the look. "Mrs. Temple will find it tough work to attend to business and an invalid at the same time."

"This gentleman is Miss Lee's cousin, and acts as our London agent," Mrs. Temple hastened to explain, though she felt so bewildered that her own voice sounded to her as if some one else was speaking.

"Oh," said Dr. Slade.

"Ah," said Lady Styles.

"Well," continued the Doctor, "it seems I am all in the wrong box. I thought I was doing Mrs. Temple a good turn this dead season, by bringing her a tenant who is likely to be tied by the leg for a month at any rate; a rich man, who does not care what he pays, and now you are all down upon me!"

"My dear Doctor!" cried Lady Styles deprecatingly.

"I am obliged to you," said Mrs. Temple quickly; "I feel sure you wished to serve me. We must all do our utmost to make this—this gentleman well. I shall think nothing a trouble, so as it is done quickly; but," with great emphasis, "I trust he will not die under my roof!"

"Die! not a bit of it," exclaimed the Doctor cheerfully; "and as to trouble, you need not take any. Sir Hugh's own servant, who seems an intelligent handy fellow, can do nearly all that is necessary; if you want more help, why, get it, and put it in the bill; you need not be afraid to charge," and Dr. Slade took up his hat in a sort of huffed manner.

"I am told Sir Hugh Galbraith has lately come into a large fortune by somebody's will," said Lady Styles, as if inclined to settle down to a fresh feast of gossip.

"There is some one in the shop, I think, Fanny," observed Mrs. Temple, significantly.

Fanny left the room and returned almost immediately, while Dr. Slade was remarking sternly, "I know nothing whatever about the man except that he, Lord Herbert de Courcy, and a Colonel Upton occupied Hurst Lodge for the hunting season. I have heard, too, that this Galbraith was the rich man of the party—so——"

"It is your servant, Lady Styles," interrupted Fanny. "Your carriage has been waiting some time."

"Dear me! I suppose so. It must be five o'clock!"

"Quarter to six," said Tom, looking at his watch.

"And I have nearly four miles to drive!" cried Lady Styles. "I must really run away, Mrs. Temple; but I shall send to-morrow to inquire how Sir Hugh is going on. The day after we are going into Yorkshire to stay with a niece of mine for a month, but as soon as ever I return I shall call, and expect to have a lot of news. Come, Doctor, I will set you down at your house if you like."

"Oh, Doctor! will you not come back this evening?" said Mrs. Temple anxiously.

"Certainly, certainly! between nine and ten. And look here, Mrs. Temple, give the groom a good supper, it will keep matters straight."

"Good morning, or rather evening, Mrs. Temple. Good evening, Mr.—a—Mr. Tom,"

said Lady Styles graciously. "I shall always remember the shrimps whenever I hear of Sir Hugh Galbraith!" and she squeezed through the narrow door, followed by the Doctor and Fanny to see her safe off the premises.

As Tom opened his lips, Mrs. Temple raised her hand to enjoin silence, and held it so, listening till the sound of the carriage driving off and the return of Fanny seemed to relax the tension of her nerves, and she sat down suddenly, as if no longer able to stand.

"This is the rummest go I ever knew!" cried Tom, taking up a position on the hearthrug.

"It has taken away my breath," said Fanny, heaving a deep sigh.

"Oh, Tom, Tom! how dreadful it will be if he dies!" said Mrs. Temple, clasping her hands.

"Awkward, exceedingly awkward!" returned Tom, thoughtfully. "However, as it cannot be helped, let us hope he will recover and clear out quickly. Don't you be tempted to put strychnine in his gruel, or prussic acid in his beef tea."

"But, Tom, he looked like death!"

"Why did you look at him?" asked Fanny.

- "You should have kept back in the dark, as I did."
- "Seriously, though," resumed Tom Reed, "this contretemps may prove very awkward. Suppose his solicitor comes down to see him, and recognises you?"
- "You forget! I never saw his solicitor in my life."
- "That's all right; then there is nothing to fear. I fancied you had met Payne one day at Wall's. Keep out of Sir Hugh's way, and there need be no discovery."
- "I do hope he will not die," repeated Mrs. Temple, recovering herself: "for every reason. Of course some one would inherit after him, and I should have to fight the battle all the same, but victory would lose almost all its charm were it won over any other antagonist."
- "May we venture to sit down and talk \hat{a} propos of this said battle?" asked Tom.
- "Oh, yes!" cried Mrs. Temple; "I am burning to hear your report. Fanny, will you see Mills and ask her to get some supper ready for Sir Hugh's servant? How extraordinary to give such directions! Is it a good omen, Tom—my enemy being brought in senseless and helpless just as the first dawn of light

begins to break—that is to say, if you have brought me any information?"

"A little—a very little," returned Tom.

"Don't begin till I come back," cried Fanny.

"And oh, Kate! I had better not tell Mills who it is to-night, and you must tell her.

What a fury she will be in!"

Tom, disregarding Fanny's injunction, immediately began to detail his interview with Captain Gregory, whom he described as a regular merchant seaman, rough, but kindly, evidently accustomed to keep his eyes open, and his wits ready for active service. He had heard but little of the subject in question beyond the death of Mr. Travers, and the timely assistance afforded to Mrs. Bell by his widow. He was therefore sorry to hear of the present state of things, and ready to give all the information in his power.

"He said he well remembered 'Father' mentioning the will, though not its contents. 'The old gentleman was a bit of a "grumbler," said Captain Gregory, 'and I remember now, nearly two years ago, his growling about Mr. Travers not being the man he was, or he would have raised his salary, for he used to see into everything himself, but now he left too much for Ford, and somehow Ford didn't use to be

very friendly to father; but for all that, says father, "Mr. Travers trusted me to draw his will, and I do not think Ford will like to have a woman over him by and by, as he will have." Whereby,' added the Captain, 'I thought Mrs. Travers was to have everything."

"Did your father say he wrote it himself, or employed some one else?"

"He wrote it all—so I understood. Father wrote a splendid hand—two or three sorts of hands; and I remember his saying he thought he might have a rise in his salary, after being trusted so far, for Mr. Travers made a secret of the will; and, you see, my sister and her children were a terrible drain on father. And he said, too, that there was no mention of him in the will, for, says he, "I witnessed it, as well as drew it "-he, and a man he called Poole. But Mr. Travers said he would give Mrs. Travers some instructions respecting father, which, added Tom's informant, 'I suppose he did, sir, from the great kindness she showed my sister."

This was the substance of all Tom Reed could extract from Captain Gregory.

Kate listened, without interrupting by word or motion the narrative, and kept silent for a moment after he had ceased. "This strongly confirms my own belief," she said at last; "but what is it worth in the opinion of others?"

"Not a great deal, I fear," replied Tom, though the words were spoken more to himself than addressed to her. "You see, Mr. Travers might have destroyed that will a week, a day, after it was made, and executed another. To you this morsel of intelligence is confirmation strong; in a court of law it would be valueless."

"What do you think yourself?" asked Fanny, who had crept quietly back into the room.

"Well," said Reed, looking up with a smile at Mrs. Temple, "I am exceedingly reluctant to encourage or suggest false hope, but there are two points in Gregory's account that struck me as supporting your view: first, the will drawn by his father must have been executed, from what he says, about the same time as the one under which you have been dispossessed; secondly, the witnesses are the same. These facts certainly give colour to your impression, that a false document has been substituted for the one drawn out by Gregory."

"What is the penalty for committing forgery?" asked Mrs. Temple, abruptly. "Penal servitude, for a term of years, according to the circumstances of the case. Why? Have you a vision of your unknown enemy in the dock?"

"I have," said Mrs. Temple; "and the horror of it makes me hesitate, for it will yet be in my power to put him there."

Her voice faltered as she said this, and to the great surprise of both Tom and Fanny, she burst into tears, and hurried from the room.

- "Poor dear Kate," cried the latter. "I do not know when I saw her cry before. But she has been wonderfully upset by this accident, and that wretched man being carried in! Is it not unfortunate? I had better go to her."
- "No, don't," said Tom. "I am certain she would be better alone. Yes; it is most unlucky Galbraith being brought here; yet after all they need not meet!"
- "No, I suppose not. But, Tom, I would so much like to go in and see what he is like—to speak to him, I mean—that is if he recovers. In spite of poor Kate's tears, it is so funny, the idea of having Sir Hugh—the great bogie of our existence, absolutely living in the house, and Mills cooking for him. How will

Mills bear it when she knows?—and she must know! I really think I will go and ask what he will have for dinner some day, as if I was the housemaid."

"I beg you will do no such thing," said Tom, sharply. "You are so thoughtless! You would never be out of a scrape if you hadn't Mrs. Travers at your elbow."

"I am not quite such a stupid," pouted. Fanny; "and I can tell you I shall do as I like!"

"My dear child," returned Tom, "don't you think it is only natural I should wish to prevent my pretty little cousin from venturing into the den of an ungodly dragoon like Galbraith, and in the character of a housemaid, too? Heaven only knows what impertinence he might be guilty of!"

"Is he so very wicked?" asked Fanny, opening her eyes, but not appearing as much horrified as she ought to have been.

"I really know nothing about him," said Tom Reed, laughing. "He is like other men, I suppose, neither better nor worse. It is very natural for Mrs. Travers to dislike him; but, except for that foolish and insulting letter he wrote, he has done nothing exceptionally wrong or unjust. He certainly made a shabby offer—I mean the allowance—but I daresay he might have been induced to give more. Then you must remember he never had an opportunity of correcting his idea of Mrs. Travers by personal intercourse, and

"Tom!" interrupted Fanny, indignantly, "I am astonished at you! making excuses for Sir Hugh in that way! He is a brute! at any rate he behaved like one."

"I protest, Fanny, you are the most unreasonable, hopeless, faithful little partisan that any one was ever tormented with. I cannot afford to quarrel with you, because I must be in town on Monday morning, and bid you good-bye to-morrow."

The conversation accordingly took a more personal direction, and Mrs. Temple's absence did not appear so prolonged as it really was.

"Perhaps, after all," said Fanny, who had gradually changed round to take a more rose-coloured view of things in general, after a long, desultory but charming talk, "his coming here may lead to good; I mean Sir Hugh Galbraith."

[&]quot;How do you make that out?"

[&]quot;He may get to know Kate, and she him, and divide the property."

"Don't talk such preposterous nonsense, my darling! Don't you see, it would never do for him to know who Mrs. Temple is? It would be the most cruel mortification to her to be recognized by him in her present position. If you are all quiet and prudent, this contretemps will not signify; that is to say, if the man does not die. If he does, it will be most awkward."

Here Mrs. Temple returned. The sufferer, she said, still lay unconscious and insensible; but his servant, Mills reported, seemed not despondent. He had been in the wars, he said, with his master, and had seen him worse hit and recover. "And, Fanny," continued the young widow, "I have broken the fatal intelligence to Mills. She was thunder-struck, indignant, speechless—but she is now calmer, and resigned to the necessity of the case. This is one difficulty off my mind," concluded Mrs. Temple, with a sigh.

Soon after Dr. Slade came in, and having visited his patient, re-entered the parlour only to repeat that there was nothing to be done—nothing but patience; that he hoped to-morrow would bring a favourable change.

He then proceeded to give an elaborate account of how the accident occurred, much of

which was Hebrew and Greek to Mrs. Temple and Fanny, but interested Tom Reed considerably, so the Doctor went on fluently. The rest of the Hurst Lodge party had left, he informed them, and Sir Hugh, who had remained for the finish of the season, was a stranger in the county when he came down, and had remained so. He was a silent. haughty, ungenial sort of man, Dr. Slade had been informed. He did not seem to have many friends or relatives, for the only person, suggested by his servant, to be informed of the accident was Colonel Upton. —th Hussars, Dublin, and to him the Doctor had accordingly written. The talk then flowed from hunting to politics, and the Doctor, finding Tom Reed a companion of a far different calibre from those to whom he was accustomed, prolonged the sitting till a late hour; but at last he departed, and, greatly wearied by the events and emotions of the day, the two friends bade Tom good night, and gladly retired to rest.

Another day of great anxiety, though not of so much excitement, ensued. Several gentlemen connected with the Hunt came and sent to make inquiries for the injured baronet. Lady Styles despatched a man on horseback

with a note to Dr. Slade, which drew forth some strong language from that gentleman, as he objected to the trouble of replying; but, in spite of all these disturbances, Mrs. Temple contrived to enjoy some comfort in taking counsel with Tom. She reluctantly agreed with him in thinking there was no more to be done at present. Tom suggested that the substance of Captain Gregory's statement should be embodied in an affidavit in case the worthy seaman should be inaccessible when any further light came. Then they must fold their hands again and wait. This course was decided on, also that it was unnecessary to open the subject again with Messrs. Wall and Wreford until they had more to communicate.

"Do you know," said Tom, as he stood ready to depart, "I am almost sorry we have looked up this captain? His information has not done you a bit of good. It only serves to irritate and chafe you, by confirming your suspicions of foul play."

"No, Tom," returned Kate. "In one sense it comforts me, by confirming my belief that my poor husband was worthy of my affection and respect; that he was not base enough to leave me penniless, friendless, and scarred

with the suspicions to which such a will leaves me open!"

"You are unnecessarily sore on that head! The whims of testators never reflect upon those who suffer from them," returned Tom. "That would be too bad. Now I must be off: write to me every day, one or other of you, please. I shall settle that matter of the affidavit directly I get to town."

It was not till towards evening on the day after his accident that Sir Hugh Galbraith began to show consciousness, after which beginning he recovered his senses rapidly.

The third day brought a solemn, carefullydressed gentleman from London, who announced himself to be Mr. George Galbraith, and next of kin to Sir Hugh. He asked to see the mistress of the house, and Mrs. Temple sent Mills, who knew more of the patient's case than she did. Mills proved an excellent She reported the new comer representative. as a nice, civil-spoken gentleman. He had received intelligence of the accident from Colonel Upton, who had telegraphed to the Doctor requesting further tidings, and stating that it was almost impossible that he could leave his regiment at present.

"Mr. G. St. John Galbraith" (such was the inscription on his card) had an interview with his cousin—not a very long one—and departed, "looking," said Fanny, who took a stolen peep at him through an inch-wide opening of the parlour door, "'a sadder and a wiser man' than when he arrived. Depend upon it, Kate, he is the next heir, and is quite disappointed."

"For shame, Fanny," returned her friend.

A few days more, and ten had elapsed since the accident. As Dr. Slade had assured Mrs. Temple, there was very little to be done, and very little additional trouble given to the quiet household. Mrs. Mills confessed that Sir Hugh's man was very different from "that other glum, dour fellow we had here. He doesn't talk much, but he has a civil word when he does open his mouth, and saves a body what trouble he can."

It seemed incredible that the arch enemy should be installed under Kate Travers's roof and make so little difference. A constant odour of beef tea in the kitchen, a little more compounding of light puddings, a larger roast for the one o'clock dinner, a larger consumption of the bitter beer which Tom so highly approved—these were the outward and visible signs of

the wonderful event that had so mightily disturbed the quiet current of the young widow's life.

Sir Hugh had now progressed into the sitting-room, and at times, when the shop was silent, Kate and Fanny could hear him slowly pacing to and fro. Every day the Doctor paid him a long visit, after which he usually informed Mrs. Temple, rubbing his hands joyously while he spoke, that "Sir Hugh was going on very well—very well indeed—but could not move just yet; would do better if he was a little more patient."

Sir Hugh became a customer also. He had all the papers and publications Mrs. Temple could supply, besides books from Mudie's, Indian papers, literature in abundance of the lighter kind, and, as time wore on, the house became pervaded by the perfume of very good tobacco.

"Ah!" said Fanny, when she first perceived it, "that is delicious! it reminds me of Tom!"

One rainy afternoon, nearly a fortnight after Sir Hugh Galbraith had become her tenant, Mrs. Temple and Fanny were both in the shop—the latter at work on a piece of "grounding" shekept at hand for unemployed moments, the former sheltered behind a screen of pen-

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dent patterns, finishing a delightful, brilliant article in a "Westminster Review" left her by Tom Reed. It was a hopeless sort of day for business, scarcely any customers had crossed the threshold, and Mrs. Temple felt quite at liberty to obey a mysterious "nod and beck" from Mrs. Mills, delivered through the little parlour window. "Do you know, ma'am," said Mills, as soon as her mistress crossed the threshold, "Sir Hugh Galbraith wants you to go up and write a letter for him?"

"Write a letter," repeated Mrs. Temple, astounded.

"Yes," persisted Mills, frowning yet laughing. "I felt as if I could throw the jug I had in my hand at him. His man has gone over to the place he had; I believe it is to be given up to-morrow. So I went to answer the bell, and says he, 'Can you write?' 'Of course I can,' says I. 'Very well,' says he; 'quick! get the writing materials, and be so good as to write a letter for me.' 'That's quite different,' says I; 'I couldn't write well enough for you, sir.' 'Oh!' says he, 'you are not the woman of the house, are you?' 'No, sir,' says I. 'Well, I daresay she writes well enough; I wish you would ask her to come here,' says he, impatient like. So I just

came to you, for I didn't know what to say."

Mrs. Temple stood silent, gazing fixedly at Mills without seeing her, for a minute or two in deep thought. Should she refuse? Should she send Fanny? No; Fanny was too young -too giddy. Moreover she had a strange sort of wish to stand face to face with her foe. While she hesitated, a sharp, angry peal of the drawing-room bell startled her into deci-"I will go, Mills," she said; "tell Miss Fanny." Without giving herself time to think or grow nervous Kate ran upstairs, and opening the door, which stood ajar, entered so quietly that Sir Hugh did not hear her. was stretched upon the sofa, a cigar in his mouth and the Times in his left hand; his right arm tied up and in a sling. A tall, gaunt-looking figure, wrapped in a grey dressing gown covered with Indian embroidery in the same colour; a long, thin face, very pale though rather weather-beaten; long red moustaches, hair a shade darker and somewhat scanty upon the temples, one of which was scarred, as if by a sword cut. As he made no movement, Mrs. Temple advanced to a table that stood in the middle of the room.

and, leaning one hand lightly upon it, said, "You wished to see me."

At the sound of her soft, but remarkably distinct tones, Sir Hugh looked up in great surprise, and starting to his feet threw his cigar into the fire.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, in a deep, harsh voice, though the accent was well bred, and gazing at her intently with, she thought, the sternest and most sombre eyes she had ever met; "I beg your pardon; I wanted to speak to the woman of the house."

"I am the woman of the house," returned Mrs. Temple, quietly, meeting and returning his gaze unflinchingly, her large dark eyes lit up with an expression of which she was unconscious, but which Sir Hugh afterwards described to a confidential friend as "the sort of look you might expect from a man that stood foot to foot with you, his sword across yours. There was hatred and defiance both in her eyes."

For an instant they paused, gazing fascinated at each other, then Sir Hugh recovering himself said composedly enough, "Indeed! May I trouble you to write a few lines for me? I am anxious not to lose this day's post, or I would not ask you."

- "I will write for you if you require it," returned Mrs. Temple, simply. "Where are your writing things?"
 - "On the cabinet; but I will get them."
- "Allow me," said Mrs. Temple; "you had better not exert yourself, I imagine." She brought over a blotting-book and inkbottle, and, setting them on the table, observed, "I see no pen. I will bring one," and went away quickly to her own desk. When she returned Sir Hugh was standing exactly in the same position in which she had left him. She immediately sat down, arranged the paper, and dipping her pen in the ink, looked up, saying, "I am quite ready." Again she met the same grave, surprised, inquiring gaze; again there was an unconscious pause of mutual contemplation.
 - "I am ready," repeated Mrs. Temple.
 - "My dear Upton," began Sir Hugh.
- "If you begin in the first person," said Mrs. Temple abruptly, for she could not feel him to be a stranger, "how will you sign your name? You cannot write! Had I not better begin: "I am directed by Sir Hugh Galbraith?"
 - "Then you must sign it, and that won't

do," he returned. "I will try and sign with my left hand."

"Very well, go on then," said Mrs. Temple.

- "My dear Upton,—Thanks for yours. I believe I am nearly all right again, though still a little shaky. If your friend's horse is all you say, and you are a fair judge, I feel inclined to buy him."
- "One moment," interrupted Mrs. Temple, looking up with a smile; "I am not writing shorthand."
- "I beg your pardon," smiling in return, which greatly improved his countenance: "I never had the honour of having a private secretary before, and scarcely know how to dictate."
- "To buy him," read Mrs. Temple, keeping her eyes on the paper; "go on." Sir Hugh did not go on for a moment; but Mrs. Temple did not move, holding her pen in readiness and her eyes cast down.
 - "If he is all you say," continued Galbraith.
 - "You said that before."
 - "Would you read it over to me?"

Mrs. Temple complied.

"Oh . . . ah . . . yes; 'inclined to buy him.' Although now the season is over I really do not want a hunter. I shall there-

fore not give the price asked nor make any offer until I see the animal—"

Mrs. Temple held up her hand, and Galbraith stopped abruptly, until her pen was arrested, and again without looking up, she read aloud, "the animal."

"Which," he resumed this time quite readily, "from what you say, I shall have an opportunity of doing, if I can only get up to town before Tattersall's next sale. What I want is a good weight carrier, that 'can stand the jar of big drops without giving way; for I think I shall hunt in ——shire next season, and that is a very stiff country."

Again a warning finger made him pause, nor was he prepared when she read over the last word; so she was obliged to say "Well," and look up, before he continued. This time she met his eyes fixed upon her with the same grave, wondering expression, but less stern than at first.

"'Country,'" repeated Sir Hugh. "Let me see. Oh... You know a horse must be deep in the girths and deuced strong in the forelegs to carry me well to the front in ——shire." Another pause.

"I must not trouble you too much," said Galbraith, slowly pulling out his moustaches, as if his inventive powers were exhausted. "Just say I am thinking of parting with my roan mare; she would make him a capital charger; that I am afraid my sword-arm will never be the same again; and that I hope to see him in London before long."

"Have you that down?" after a few minutes' silence.

"I have."

"Then just end it; and I will try and sign my name."

"But what sort of ending shall I put?" asked Kate.

"Yours truly," returned Galbraith.

"Upton never had so legible an epistle from me before," he added, as she handed him the letter to read; placing the blotting-book, ink, and pen near him while he was thus occupied. Then a difficulty arose; besides that of using his left hand, Sir Hugh had no other wherewith to steady the paper, seeing which, Mrs. Temple, with the natural impulse of a kindly, self-forgetful woman, stepped forward and held it for him; so he contrived to scrawl his signature. "Thank you, you really have done me a great service," said he quietly. "Now, will you direct an envelope, and I will release you? What a capital hand,"

he continued, still holding the letter, while Mrs. Temple addressed the cover; "so clear—and—well spelt," as if speaking to himself.

"Tradespeople generally receive a good plain education," said Mrs. Temple demurely, while the suspicion of a smile played in the corners of her mouth; she could not resist the temptation to play with the piquante peculiarities of her position. "Shall I put up your note, or do you want anything added?" holding out her hand.

"Nothing more, thank you," replied Galbraith, slowly returning it to her; and she proceeded quickly and methodically to arrange the writing materials much more tidily than they had been, and put them in their place.

"Pray," said Sir Hugh, moving slowly across the room, and looking to Mrs. Temple considerably taller and more gaunt than when lying on the sofa—"Pray may I venture to ask your services as secretary again? I may have to answer a letter or two, and I am really helpless."

"I am sure," she returned, a faint increase of colour enriching her cheek, "Doctor Slade would be happy to be of any use to you, and would be a more suitable amanuensis."

"I don't think so. Doctors write such fearful hieroglyphics. I trust you will be good enough to assist me in an emergency."

"In an emergency, yes," said Kate quickly. "I will have your letter posted at once," she added. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning, and thank you," said Galbraith, holding the door open for her to pass through, while he bowed as deferentially as though she had been a duchess.

Mrs. Temple breathed a little quickly as she went into the kitchen to despatch Sarah to the post, and then proceeded to stand the brunt of a severe cross-examination from Fanny.

"What a long time you have been," she cried. "What is he like? What was the letter about?" All of which Kate answered more or less to her companion's satisfaction. Indeed, both friends made very merry over the interview. "I am sure, Kate, your description of the renowned Sir Hugh sounds like an ogre."

"No; he is not like an ogre, though he is far from good-looking; evidently a cold,

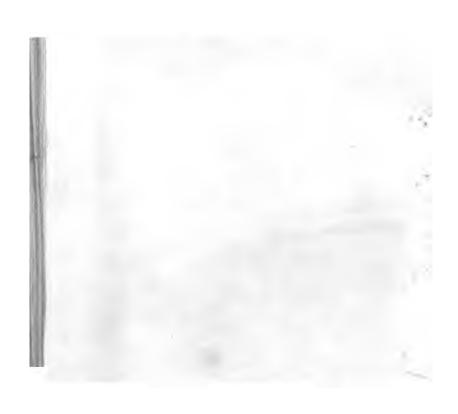
haughty man, yet not quite like what I expected."

"Nobody ever is," said Fanny, philosophically.

When Mrs. Temple was safe in her own room that night, she lit a second candle, and placing one on each side of her glass looked long at her own image; then rising from her seat, murmured to herself: "No, it would be undignified, unprincipled, unfair; yet, from all I can read and observe, men do not take disappointments to heart and suffer from them like women." Again she looked in the glass: "A bit of vulgar prettiness," she repeated. "He might have been contented to take me for a mistress." Might he? Of course it was optional to so great a man, "so superior to my lowliness; and he must have found me out in some delinquency," She paused. "It is a great temptation!" So saying, she extinguished the lights, and went to bed.

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